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PIERS PLOWMAN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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MALVERN

PIERS PLOWMAN

A Contribution to the History of
English Mysticism

✓ BY
J. J. JUSSE_"RAND

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

M. E. R.
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REVISED AND ENLARGED BY THE AUTHOR

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“MYSTICISME. Croyance religieuse ou philosophique qui admet des communications secrètes entre l'homme et la divinité.

MYSTIQUE. Qui a un caractère de spiritualité allégorique en parlant des choses de la religion.”

LITTRE.

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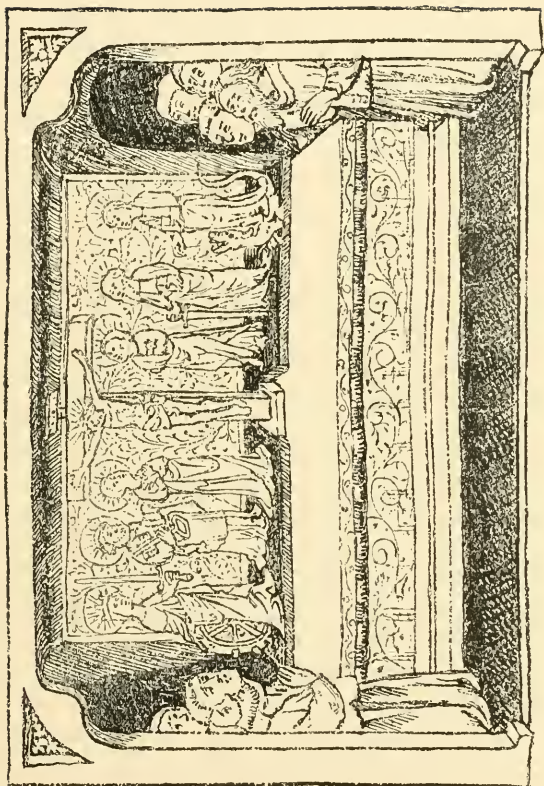
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A "GLORIOUS TABERNACLE."
LYDGATE'S *Translation of Dignatille's Pilgrimage.*



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Tyl the day dawede • these damseles daunsede.

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GOWER CONFESSING HIS SINS TO GENIUS.
(From MS. Egerton 1991, in the British Museum).

Piers Plowman.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORK AND THE DAY.

“Many tyme this meteles
hath maked me to studye.”
B. vii. 143.

I.

THE poets of the Middle Ages wander about the meadows. The sun shines, the birds sing, the flowers open and perfume the air, a stream of clear water glides over the pebbles; like the birds, the river sings. To this music, the poet sleeps, and his slumber is peopled by dreams.) He dreams *de omni re scibili*, and it takes his whole existence to tell all he has seen; nay, one life-time does not always suffice; he dies, having been unable to write more than five thousand verses, and another poet must come and sleep in his stead, in order to finish, in eighteen thousand lines, the dream commenced forty years before. This happened to Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, authors of the “Roman de la Rose.”

Among so many dreams, French, Italian, German,

English, dreams of youth, and dreams of beauty, dreams where Science teaches sciences, and Love teaches love, only a very few have deserved the grander and nobler name of "Visions." It was not to dream vain dreams that the Florentine of old, when half-way on life's journey, walked into the shadows of an obscure forest, and followed the path that leads to the abode of the doomed race. "Day was departing, and the waning light closed for the creatures upon earth the period of their toils. And I, alone among them all, prepared to undergo the hardships of the way and the pangs of pity, which my faithful memory will now tell." The flowers have closed, and no bird sings.

At the other end of Europe, there blossomed, in the same century, a literature of which Chaucer was the master mind, a sunny and living literature, teeming with the aspirations and the tenderness, ringing with the laugh, of a young and already great nation. Many English poets dreamed on the banks of rivers; Chaucer himself had a dream "in a litel herber"; Gower was affected with dreams all his life. On the flowery margin of a stream, at the base of crystal rocks, under the shade of green boughs, the author of that exquisite poem, the "Pearl,"¹ beheld his daughter taken away from him by Death, a pearl lost in the grass, a shed rose-leaf.

And while dreamers sang and dreamers prayed, a bizarre and mysterious being,—concerning whom we possess no contemporaneous testimony, whom nobody saw, though he mingled in crowds all his life, passing

¹ "Pearl, an English Poem of the XIVth Century," ed. Gollancz. London, 1891, 8vo.

amid them unobserved,—disdained dreams, and wrote *Visions for England*, as Dante did for Italy. Place him at whatever distance you will from Dante, he is the only poet of the century whose mystic visions deserve to be mentioned after the epic of the illustrious Florentine. All that relates to this personage is contradictory, and scarcely explicable. He dwelt in London unseen. His book had a prodigious success; and no poet of the time makes any certain allusion to it. So great was his influence, that, from out his writings, were taken watchwords at the time of the great rising of the peasants; yet the public powers, though they meddled then in many matters, appear to have left him alone.

His poem is not only strange, it is likewise grand and beautiful, and is far from being as well known as it should be. From a historical point of view, again, it offers considerable interest, for, as in Chaucer's tales, all England is in it. The same types are there: knights, monks, mendicant friars, pardoners, London shopkeepers, poor working-men, honest labourers, gay, tavern-haunting roysterers, and pious clerks creeping to heaven under the shadow of the church. To possess duplicates of Chaucer's portraits would be, in itself, of the highest importance; but these are far better than duplicates; they are the same personages seen at another angle, placed in a different light, and judged by a poet who, though thoroughly English, is English in a different way from Chaucer. It is impossible to form an idea of English society at this important period, when it received its definitive characteristics, without comparing these two series of paintings, equally inte-

resting from the manner in which they are alike, and unlike.

Let us then, follow, instead of Virgil, this strange and unknown guide. Not among the Dead will he lead us ; for it is a peculiarity of his Visions, that, with all the awe that surrounds them, they are visions of actual life. At times, clouds, vapours, and abstractions obscure the scene ; we are blinded and smothered ; then suddenly, the cloud lifts, the wind disperses it, and we behold, as clearly as if we were in them, a London street of the XIVth century, the tavern where cut-purses meet, the comfortable cottage of the false hermit, the library and silent cloister where the tide of pious life flows on. Following this guide, let us resign ourselves, beforehand, to the tumult of the taverns and the obscurity of the clouds.

II.

Before stepping into the maze of the old city's bye-streets, and following pathways laid out in the clouds, it will not be amiss to select landmarks ; and a short historical memento will be perhaps to the purpose. Here are the principal facts and dates which should be remembered when dealing with our visionary. Both dates and facts are well known, but well-known things are not always remembered.

At the moment when the period that occupies us opens, Edward III., of the family of the Angevin Plantagenet kings, reigns in England. He has succeeded to his father, in 1327, after a horrible tragedy. Aided

by her lover Mortimer, Queen Isabella had first deposed her husband, Edward II., and then caused him to be assassinated. By order of Edward III., Mortimer was put to death in 1330, and Isabella was confined to the castle of Risings during the last twenty-seven years of her life.

In 1337, Edward III. takes the title of King of France; the Hundred Years' War commences the following year. In 1340, he gains the naval battle of the Sluys; and in 1346 the battle of Crécy, where his eldest son, the Black Prince, "wins his spurs." He takes Calais in 1347; on September 19, 1356, the Black Prince, victorious at Poitiers, makes King John of France prisoner. Peace is signed at Brétigny in 1360, and John, who has consented to pay three million pieces of gold, returns to France for a short time.

At home, the English Parliament increasingly affirms its authority; all its efforts tend towards the unification and concentration of the English community. The wars with France are royal, and not national, wars; the English are subject to Edward III. as king of England, and not as king of France: they loudly affirm the same in Parliament, and the king has to take a solemn pledge to this effect: "The King to all those . . . &c. Hail.—We desire, grant, and establish for us, and our heirs, and successors, with the assent of the prelates, earls, barons, and Commons of our said kingdom of England . . . that, because we are king of France and that the said kingdom appertaineth to us . . . our aforesaid kingdom of England, nor the people thereof, of whatsoever estate or condition they be, shall never, now or hereafter, be put under subjection of, or

obedience to us, our heirs, or successors, as kings of France.”¹

When the distant interests of the Crown are in question, the Commons express themselves modestly, and even, occasionally, refuse to express themselves at all. Consulted in 1334, on the subject of the attitude to be observed towards France, they reply, in respectful terms, that it is the king's affair, and not theirs: “And it seemeth to us that our aforesaid lord, the king, must act towards that country as seemeth best to his lordship, being a thing that he has inherited, and that has descended to his royal person by direct lineage, and appertaineth not to the kingdom or crown of England.”² But when the question concerns the kingdom of England, no more modesty or timidity; the Commons denounce, threaten, condemn even. Under the last Plantagenets, the English could say, as they do to-day: “The business of the State is my business.”

While they were intent upon diminishing the

¹ “Le roi à toutz ceux . . . [etc.] Saluz . . . Voloms, grantoms et establissoms pur nous et pur noz heirs et successours, par assent des prelates, countes, barouns et Communes de nostre dit roialme d'Engleterre . . . qe par cause ou colour de ceo qe nous soïoms Roi de France et qe ledit roialme nous appartient . . . nostre dit roialme d'Engleterre ne les gentz d'ycell de quel estat ne condition qu'ils soient, ne soient en nul temps avenir, mys en la subjection de nous, noz heirs ne successours come roys de France.”—“Statutes of the Realm,” 14 Ed. III., st. 5, year 1340.

² “Et lour semble que nostre dit Seigneur le Roi poet et doit faire en celle partie sicome à sa noble seigneurie mieltz semblera à faire, come de chose qu'est son propre héritage, qu'est par droit lignage roiale descenduz à sa noble persone et noun pas appartenant al roialme ne à la coroune d'Engleterre.”—“Rotuli Parliamontorum,” vol. iii. p. 170.

power of the king with regard to themselves, impeaching his ministers and domineering over his household, the Commons endeavoured to magnify their sovereign abroad. It was another way of magnifying themselves, for they were, at times, the real sovereigns of England, or, at least, they were partners with the king in his kingship. If the English interests engaged in France do not move them much, they keep an eye on the foreign interests subsisting in England. They do not tire of denouncing the Jews and Lombards, cosmopolitan bankers and aliens ; the friars and monks of extraneous origin admitted into English convents, men too without a country ; and above all are they anxious concerning the close ties that bind England to Rome, and the power which the Pope exercises in their island.

They struggle to obtain the diminution of this power, which will be transferred to the king ; and again, in this respect, the nation coalesces and consolidates, and we behold the foreshadowing of a movement in favour of the royal supremacy which will produce, under Henry VIII., its definitive results. Hence these statutes of "Provisors" and "Præmunire," and the confirmations of the same, which were periodically made,¹ with the object of restricting the action of Rome in the presentation to benefices in England, and also of preventing those appeals to the Pontifical Court of which the consequences, according to the Commons, were to "undo and adnul the laws of the realm."² In 1366,

¹ See especially 25 Ed. III., st. 6 ; 27 Ed. III., st. 1 ; 38 Ed. III., st. 2 ; 3 Rich. II., chap. 3 ; 12 Rich. II., chap. 15 ; 13 Rich. II., st. 2, chap. 2 ; 16 Rich. II., chap. 5. "Statutes of the Realm."

² "Rotuli Parliamentorum," 25 Ed. III., 1350-51.

Parliament declares void and of no effect the deed by which John Lackland had acknowledged the suzerainty of the Pope over the kingdom, and Edward III. expressly refuses the tribute to the Roman Pontiff, instead of simply not paying it, as had been the case for many years.

This movement was facilitated by the decline of the papal prestige. From 1305, the popes are settled at Avignon. They leave that town for Rome in 1376, but soon after, in 1378, begins the great schism of the West, which lasts till 1449. There are now two popes, and Christendom stands divided; apostles of peace and vicars of Christ though they be, the two Holy Fathers war with each other. Urban III. orders a crusade to be preached in England against Clement VII. and the French; there is fighting in Flanders, and the English are led by a bishop, Henry le Despencer, to the great scandal of all right-minded Christians.

The tendencies to regular formation, which manifest themselves in the land, are periodically stopped and thwarted, and a variety of events, sudden and terrible for the most part, come and cast perturbation in men's minds and cause disorganisation in the State: pestilences, tempests, heresies, revolts, disasters of all kinds. Calm reigns again, and patient humanity resumes its work; the plague reappears, and the stone rolls back once more. The principal plagues were those of 1349, 1361-2, 1369, and 1375.¹ The first was fearful above all the others. The depopulation was such that

¹ This, I think, is the right year. See, *contra*, Skeat, "Piers Plowman," Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. xiii, who dates this last plague 1376.

the king forbade his subjects, by an act of December 1, 1349, to quit the kingdom: "Quia non modica pars populi regni nostri Angliae in praesenti pestilentia est defuncta, et thesaurus ejusdem regni plurimum exhaustus."¹ Exception is necessarily made for messengers, merchants, and men of business. About half the population had perished, whence arose an excessive increase in the price of labour and an extraordinary confusion in the relations of class to class.

Murrains make cruel ravages, frightful storms destroy the crops, earthquakes spread terror. The monks of Meaux, near Beverley, were singing vespers; as they came to the verse, "Deposuit potentes de sede," a concussion took place, and they were thrown from their stalls.² The ruin of Basel by an earthquake, in 1356, spread throughout Christendom the same feeling of awe as did the news of a similar disaster at Lisbon in the last century. On the 14th of April, 1360, such a terrible tempest bursts in England, that men are killed by the hail, and during the storm, "the devil appeared in human shape; and it spoke."³ A tremendous hurricane devastated England anew, on the 15th of January, 1362,⁴ followed by another, the year after.

¹ Rymer, "Fœdera," 1705, vol. v. p. 668.

² "Chronica Monasterii de Melsa," London ("Rolls"), vol. iii. p. 69, A.D. 1349.

³ "Eo tempore, in Anglia, plures homines, bestiae et arbores violenter fulgure perierunt; et diabolus in humana specie apparens locutus est." Walsingham, "Historia Anglicana," vol. i. p. 290 ("Rolls"). Cf. Continuator of Murimuth, "Chronica," London, 1846 (English Historical Society), p. 193.

⁴ On this hurricane, see *infra*, Chap. II. 1. In 1363, the Commons complain to the king, "come par les pestilences et

An earthquake took place in 1382.¹ No wonder that, amidst so many shocks, which were held to be warnings from on high, and attributed to supernatural causes, minds should sometimes lose their balance, that the limits which separate reason from folly should be overstepped, and that the age should produce half-mad poets of genius, and nearly insane religious sects, all of them foretelling the end of the world. We shall have occasion to speak of both poets and sects.

Edward III. grows old ; the taste for pleasure which he has always had now remains his only one. Formerly his pleasures had at least that *éclat* which youth will give, and they were mingled with glory. Now, no more youth, no more glory, no more Countesses of Salisbury; Alice Perrers replaces her. Alice pillages and extorts, corrupts the judges, and sells the king. The Countess was beautiful ; Alice is not ; a shadow is over the king and court. So far back as 1345, the inordinate expenditure of the sovereign, and his loans to carry on his amusements and wars, have caused the failure of the Italian bankers, Bardi, Peruzzi, and Bonaccursi; renewed wars and pestilences increase the penury of the exchequer ; the Commons become threatening. In the "Good Parliament" of 1376, that sits from the 28th of April to the 6th of July, they impeach royalty itself. The Black Prince dies on the 8th of June, leaving his son Richard, a child of ten, heir to the throne. Between the old king and his grandson, both incapable, John of Gaunt, third son of Edward III., finds himself, for a

grantz ventz sont diverses meschiefs et merveillouses avenuz . . .," &c. "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 279.

¹ Wright's "Political Poems," vol. i. p. 243 ("Rolls").

time, in spite of his unpopularity, the most powerful man of the kingdom. The "Bad Parliament," an outcome of packed elections, assembles on the 27th of January, 1377, and undoes the work of the "Good Parliament." Edward dies on the 21st of June, and Richard II. mounts the throne.

Never did prince find himself face to face with similar difficulties ; he succumbed under them ; and in most of the judgments brought against him, too large a part in the disaster has been attributed to his faults, and too small a one to the difficulties of the time. In his reign occurred the great schism of 1378 ; the condemnation of Wyclif by the University of Oxford, mostly on account of his having denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, in 1381 ; the great rising of the peasants in the same year, who took London, murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury, and were on the point of overthrowing the whole social order ; the quarrel of the "lords appellant" and of the counsellors of the king. In 1389 Richard dismisses his council, and with the aid of the Commons begins his personal government ; he rules the land with skill and sagacity. From 1397 the final catastrophe is preparing. Richard governs without a parliament, as an absolute monarch ; he disinherits his cousin Henry of Derby, son of John of Gaunt Duke of Lancaster, and goes to Ireland. Henry returns suddenly from exile and lands in England, on July 4th, 1399. Richard is captured and deposed. Henry, first of the Lancastrians, comes before Parliament, and challenges and assumes the crown of England. Richard is put to death.

With the accession of Henry IV. closes the period

with which we have to do. In 1400, our visionary ceases to write, Froissart stops his chronicles, Chaucer dies.

III.

It may appear illogical to speak of the book first, and of the author afterwards. But the case is an exceptional one, and we have no choice. No contemporary writer having mentioned our visionary, and there being no document relating to him, we can only form an idea of his person through his works. It is not putting "la charrue avant les bœufs"; there are no "bœufs."

A considerable number of manuscripts of the XIVth and XVth centuries have preserved for us the visions "de Petro Plowman," so called from the hero of the poem, "Peter the Ploughman." These manuscripts differ considerably from one another; the author seems to have spent his life in remodelling his work; it would almost seem as if he identified himself with it, to the extent of having no other care, observing, pondering, and adding. In the midst of this variety of texts, three versions or chief remodellings are discernible, with which the others are more or less closely connected. The latest and most eminent editor of the poem has named them texts A, B, and C.¹ The basis

¹ Mr. Skeat has given two excellent editions of the three texts: 1st. "The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, secundum Wit, and Resoun, by William Langland." London, Early English Text Society, 1867-84, 4 vols. 8vo. 2nd. "The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman, in three parallel texts, together with Richard the Redeless, by William Langland." Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1886, 2 vols. 8vo.

and purport of the work are the same in the three texts, but the dimensions vary; the first is the briefest, the last the most developed. "A" contains twelve cantos or *passus*, "B" twenty, and "C" twenty-three.

Here is the substance of the poem. Analysed, it will appear incoherent and shapeless, but should not, on that account, be condemned. No analysis can give a satisfactory idea of that mingling of realities and shadows: tangible realities, changing shadows. "It looks like a whale," observed Prince Hamlet, gazing at the clouds . . . "or rather like a weasel. . ." The same thing might be said of the poem of the Plowman.

The sun mounts in the heavens, and reddens the summit of the Malvern hills; in the freshness of the morning, to the musical sound of waters, "it sowned so murrie," the poet falls asleep, and the first of his visions begins. He contemplates

Al the welthe of this worlde · and the woo bothe ;

and, in an immense plain, "a feir feld ful of folk," he notices the movements and bustle of mankind,

Of alle maner of men · the mene and the riche.

Mankind is represented by typical specimens of all sorts: knights, monks, parsons, workmen singing French songs, cooks crying: hot pies! "hote pyes, hote!" pardoners, pilgrims, preachers, beggars, janglers who will not work, japers and "mynstralles" that sell "glee." They are, or nearly so, the same beings Chaucer assembled at the "Tabard" inn, on the eve of

his pilgrimage to Canterbury. This crowd has likewise a pilgrimage to make, not however on the sunny high road that leads from Southwark to the shrine of St. Thomas. No, they journey through abstract countries, they follow mystic roads ; they accomplish, some three hundred years before Bunyan's Christian, their pilgrim's progress in search of Truth and of Supreme Good.

A lady appears, who explains the landscape and the vision ; she is Holy-Church. Yonder tower is the tower of Truth :

“The toure up the toft,” quod she • “treuthe is there-inne.”

This castle is the “Castel of Care,” that contains “Wronge.” Holy-Church points out how mankind ought to live, and teaches kings and knights their duties with regard to Truth.

Here comes Lady Meed, a lady of importance, whose friendship means perdition, yet without whom nothing can be done, and who plays an immense part in the world. The monosyllable which designates her has a vague and extended signification ; it means both reward and bribery. Disinterestedness, the virtue of noble minds, being rare in this world, scarcely anything is undertaken without hope of recompense, and what man, toiling solely with a view to recompense, is quite safe from bribery ? So Lady Meed is there, beautiful, alluring, perplexing ; to get on without her is impossible, and yet it is hard to know what to do with her. She is about to marry “Fals” ; the friends and witnesses have arrived, the marriage deed

is drawn up; the pair are to have the "Erl dome of Envye,"

With the chastelet of Chest (strife) · and Chaterying out of resoun; ¹

and other territories that recall the worst regions of the celebrated map of the Tendre. Opposition is made to the marriage, and the whole wedding party starts for Westminster, where the cause is to be awarded; friends, relations, bystanders; on foot, on horseback, and in carriages; a singular procession!

The king, notified of the coming of the *cortège*, publicly declares he will deal justice to the knaves, and the procession melts away; most of the friends disappear at a racing pace, through the lanes of London. The poet hastens to lodge the greatest scoundrels with the people he hates, and has them received with open arms. "Gyle" is welcomed by the merchants, who dress him as an apprentice, and make him wait on their customers. "Lyer" has at first hard work to find shelter; he hides in the obscure holes of the alleys, "lorkynge thorw lanes"; no door opens, his felonies are too notorious. At last, the pardoners "hadden pite and pullede hym to house."

Thei woshe hym and wypede hym · and wonde hym in cloutes,
And sente hym on sonnedayes · with seeles to churches,
And gaf pardons for pans (pence).

Then leeches send him letters to say that, if he would assist them "waters to loke," he should be well received; spicers have an interview with him; minstrels and messengers keep him "half a yere and eleve

¹ B. ii. 84.

dayes ; " friars dress him as a friar, and, with them, he forms the friendliest ties of all.¹

Lady Meed appears before the king's tribunal ; she is beautiful, she looks gentle, she produces a great effect ; she is Phryne before her judges, with the addition of a garment ; the judges melt, they cheer her, and so do the clerks, the friars, and all those that approach her. She is so pretty ! and so kind ! anything you will, she wills it too ; no one feels bashful in her presence ; she is indeed so kind ! A friar offers her the boon of an absolution which he will grant her " himself " ; but she must do good to the brotherhood : We have a window begun that will cost us dear ; if you would pay for the stained glass of the gable, your name should be engraved thereon, and to heaven would go your soul.² Meed is willing. The king appears and examines her ; he decides to marry her, not to Fals, but to the Knight Conscience. Meed is willing ; she is always willing.

The Knight comes, refuses, and lays bare the ill-practices of Meed, who corrupts all the orders of the kingdom, and has caused the death of "yowre fadre" (your father, King Edward II.). She would not be an amiable spouse ; she is "as comune as the cart-wey." She connives with the Pope in the presentation to benefices ; she obtains bishoprics for fools, "theighe they be lewed,"

For she is prive with the pope · provisoures it knoweth ;

Meed weeps, which is already a good answer ; then, having recovered the use of speech, she defends herself

¹ See the whole passage in Appendix, III. ² See Appendix, IV.

cleverly : the world would fall into a torpor without Meed ; knights would no longer care for kings ; priests would no longer say masses ; minstrels would sing no more songs ; merchants would not trade ; and even beggars would no longer beg.

The Knight tartly replies : There are two kinds of Meed. We knew it ; there is reward, and there is bribery, but they are always confounded. Ah ! if Reason reigned in this world instead of Meed, the golden age would return. No more wars ; no more of these varieties of tribunals, where Justice herself gets confused. At this, Meed becomes "wroth as the wynde."¹

Enough, says the King ; I can stand you no longer ; you must both serve me :

"Kisse hir," quod the Kyng · "Conscience, I hote (bid)."

"Nay, bi Criste," quod Conscience · "congeye me (dismiss me) for evere !"

And the quarrel continues ; they send for Reason, who shall decide it. Reason has his horses saddled ; they have interminable names such as "Suffre-til-I-see-my-tyme." Long before the time of the Puritans, our visionary employs names equivalent to phrases. We meet, in his poem, with a little girl, called Behave-well-or-thy-mother-will-give-thee-a-whipping,² a scarcely

¹ B. iii. 328.

² Daughter of Piers Plowman ; all the family is similarly endowed with unwieldy names :

Dame Worche-when-tyme-is · Peers wyf hyhte ;

Hus douhter hihte Do-ryght-so-other-thy-damme-shal-the-bete ;

Hus sone hihte Suffre-thy-sovereynes-have-here-wil-deme-hem-nouht-for-yf-thow-do-thow-shalt-dere-abigge.

C. ix. 80.

practical name for every-day life ; another personage, Evan the Welshman, rejoices in a name six lines long.¹

Reason arrives at Court ; the dispute between Meed and Conscience is dropped and forgotten, for another one has arisen. "Thanne come Pees into Parlement." Peace presents a petition against Wrong, and enumerates his evil actions. He has led astray Rose and Margaret ; he keeps a troupe of retainers who assist him in his misdeeds ; he attacks farms, and carries off the crops ; he is so powerful that none dare stir or complain :

I dar noughte for fere of hym • fyghte ne chyde.

These are not vain fancies. The Rolls of Parliament, the actual Parliament that was sitting at Westminster, contain numbers of similar petitions, where the real name of Wrong is given, and where the king endeavours to reply, as he does in the poem, according to the counsels of Reason.

Reason makes a speech to the entire nation, assembled in that plain which is discovered from the heights of Malvern, and where we found ourselves at the beginning of the Visions.

Then a change of scene. These scene-shiftings are frequent, unexpected, and rapid as in an opera. "Then . . .," says the poet, without further explanation : then the scene shifts ; the plain has disappeared ; a new personage, Repentance, now listens to the confession of the Deadly Sins. This is one of the most striking passages of the poem. In spite

¹ C. vii. 310.

of their abstract names, these sins are tangible realities ; the author describes their shape and their costumes ; some are bony, others are tun-bellied ; singular abstractions with warts on their noses ! We were just now in Parliament with the victims of the powerful and the wicked ; we now hear the general confession of England in the time of the Plantagenets.¹

That the conversion may be a lasting one, Truth must be sought after. Piers Plowman appears, a mystic personage, a variable emblem, that here simply represents the man of "good will," and elsewhere stands for Christ himself. He teaches the way ; gates must be entered, castles encountered, and the Ten Commandments will be passed through. Above all, he teaches every one his present duties, his active and definite obligations ; he protests against useless and unoccupied lives, against those who have since been termed "dilettanti," for whom life is a sight, and who limit their function to being sight-seers, to amusing themselves and judging others : they have no part in the play ; they are the audience. All those who live upon earth have actual, practical duties, even you, lovely ladies :

And ye, lovely ladyes · with youre longe fynghres.

All must defend, or till, or sow the field of life. The ploughing commences, but it is soon apparent that some pretend to labour, and labour not ; they are lazy or talkative, and sing songs. Piers succeeds in mastering them by the help of Hunger. Thanks to Hunger and

¹ C. vii.

Truth, possibilities are seen of a reform, of a future Golden Age, an island of England that shall be similar to the island of Utopia, imagined later by another Englishman.¹

The vision rises and fades away ; another vision and another pilgrimage commence, and occupy all the remainder of the poem, that is, from the xith to the xxiiii^d passus (C text). The poet endeavours to join in their dwellings, Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, in other terms : Good - life, Better - life, and Best - life. All this part of the book is filled with sermons, most of them energetic, eloquent, spirited, full of masterly touches leaving an ineffaceable impression on the memory and the heart : sermon of Wit, treating mainly of marriage ; sermon of Study on the Bible and on Arts and Letters ; sermon of Clergye and of Ymagynatyf ; dialogue between Hawkyn (active life) and Patience ; sermons of Faith, Hope, and Charity. Several visions are intermingled with these sermons, visions of the arrival of Christ in Jerusalem, and of the Passion ; visions of hell attacked by Jesus, and defended by Satan and Lucifer with " brasene gones," a then recent invention, which appeared particularly diabolical. Milton's Satan, in spite of having had three hundred years in which to improve his tactics, will find nothing better ; his batteries are ranged in good order ; a seraph stands behind each cannon with lighted match ; at the first discharge, angels and archangels fall to the ground :

By thousands, Angel on Archangel rolled.

¹ C. viii. to x.

They are not killed, but painfully suffer from a knowledge that they look ridiculous : "an indecent overthrow," they call it. The fiends, exhilarated by this sight, roar noisily,¹ and it is hard for us to take a tragical view of this massacring of angels.

In our Visions, Christ, conqueror of hell, liberates the souls that await his coming, and the poet awakes to the sound of bells on Easter morning.

The poem ends amid doleful apparitions ; now comes Antichrist, then Old Age, and Death. Years have fled, death draws near ; only a short time remains to live ; how employ it to the best advantage ? (Dobet). Advise me, Nature ! cries the poet. " Love ! " replies Nature :

" Lerne to love," quod Kynde · " and leve of alle othre."

¹ The angels become "to their foes a laughter." "Paradise Lost," vi. 601. Invention of guns, vi. 470.

CHAPTER II.

THE THREE VERSIONS OF THE POEM.

I.

SUCH is the substance of these Visions, of which we possess three principal versions, composed at different periods. Is it possible to date them?

These texts all contain allusions to contemporaneous events. The oldest and briefest of them mentions the abuse of the papal provisions : Meed is "prive with the pope, provisours hit knowen." These same "provisours" are used as horses for "Sire Symonye" to ride upon :

And lette apparayle provisours * on palfreis wyse,
Sire Symonye hym-selfe shal * sitte on here bakkis.¹

"Provisours" are those men who solicited and obtained from the Holy See, frequently by illicit means, presentations to benefices, even before the death of the incumbents, to the detriment of the English patrons of these benefices. We have seen that the object of the numerous statutes of "Provisors" and "Præmunire" in the XIVth century was the suppression of these abuses, which were, however, perpetually

¹ A. iii. 142 ; A. ii. 148.

recurring, so that the constant renewal of the statutes became necessary. If, therefore, the abuse is mentioned as an actual one, it is likely the passage was written in the intermediary period, between two statutes, and at a certain distance after the first, since this evil custom had had time to reappear. As will be perceived, the date of the other allusions in the same text shows that the mention of this abuse must refer to the period comprised between the first statute



MEED "ON A SCHIRREVES BACK I-SCHOD AL NEWE."

of "Provisors" in 1350-51, and the earliest confirmation of the same, given in 1364-5. The effect of the first statute does not seem to have been felt at once, for the Commons lodge again the same complaint in the two following years. They cease then to repeat it for several years; but the ill custom creeps in anew, and the statements in the Act of 1364-5 prove that,

in the Parliament of Westminster as well as in the Visions, Meed was believed "to be prive with the pope."¹

At another place, are set forth the crimes of Wronge. This enumeration much resembles the usual series of petitions in Parliament, by which the Commons begged for the redress of abuses. Three principal grievances are brought by the poet against this perturber of the public peace, which are : the exercise of the right of purveyance, which gave occasion to all sorts of excesses, as, under pretext of acting for the king, the purveyors borrowed of the poor peasants their beasts of burden, their carts, their corn, &c., and neither paid for nor restored them ; the forestalling of merchandise in order to bring about a factitious rise in the prices, and to increase the profits of the seller ; the "maintenance" of lawsuits, quarrels, &c., by means of armed men. The leaders of bands of this kind committed all manner of misdeeds, and supported by violent means, not only their own quarrels, but those of all who paid them well. Now, these three abuses,

¹ The statute is framed against all those who appeal to the Court of Rome : "Aussi touz ceux q'ont impetrez ou impètrent de la dit court [de Rome] deanées, arce-deaknées, provostez et autres dignitées, offices, chapelles ou autres bénéfices d'Églises quelconques appartenantz à la collation, donation, présentation ou disposition nostre dit seigneur le Roi ou d'autre patron lai de son dit realme : Et aussi totes semblables persones impetrours d'églises, chapelles, offices, bénéfices d'Église, pensions ou rentes amortisez et apropiiez as esglises cathédrales ou collegiales, abbaiees, priories, chanteries, hospitalx, ou autres povres maisons avant ce, qe tieles apropiations et amortissementz soient cassez et anullez par due procès." 1364-5, "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. p. 284.

mentioned in text A, are also denounced by the Commons in the Parliament of 1362.¹

In another passage—differing in this from Chaucer, who never speaks of them—the author gives his opinion concerning the wars with France. Sharing on this, as on most other points, the views of the Commons of England, he ardently wishes for peace, and approves of the one just concluded; ² he blames those nobles who

¹ He borwede of me bayyard · and brouhte him never ageyn,
Ne no ferthing him fore · for nought that I con plede.
He meyneteneth his men · to morthere myn owne,
Forstalleth my feire · fihtheth in my chepynges (bargains),
Breketh up my berne-dore · and bereth awei my whete,
And taketh (gives) me bote a tayle · of ten quarter oten.

A. iv. 40. In the parliament of 1362 (36 Ed. III.) the Commons protest against exactly the same abuses: 1. Against purveyors; they ask, "*Que le heignous noun de Purveior soit changé et nommé Achatour.*" 2. Against maintainers: "*Que les Seneschalx, tresorers, cortrerollours et touz autres officers et autres quelconques des ditz Hostelix (of the King, Queen, &c.) soient mis au tiel peine come plect au roi, en cas que nul soit trové meintenour ou favorable au contraire des ordinances.*" 3. Against forestallers: "*Que les ditz Justices eient poair d'enquerre si bien des vitailleurs, regraters, forstallers. . .*" "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. pp. 269, 270, 271. Complaints on these subjects are frequent.

² This tendency of the Commons in favour of peace had already resulted in a significant declaration, six years earlier. "Donques," the chamberlain had said, in Parliament, "*vous voillez assentir au tretée du pées perpétuel si homme la puisse avoir?—Et les dites Communes respondirent entièrement et uniement: oil! oil!*" 1354, "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. p. 262. The peace of Brétigny was ratified by Parliament: "*In quo [Parlamento] tota materia concordie coram omnibus qui aderant fuerat proposita ac etiam declarata; placuit etiam universis dictam concordiam recipere et tenere.*" Jan., 1361. Continuator of Murimuth, 1846, p. 194.

would have desired the continuation of the war in the hope of obtaining vast domains in France ; he congratulates the king on the "lordschupe" he has renounced, though his pretensions extended to the richest kingdom ever fertilised by rain :

That is the ricchest reame · that reyn over hoveth.¹

The king has done well to follow the advice of Conscience, and return "hamward," after the hardships of the campaign,² the tempests he was exposed to, and that terrible "dim cloude." The sum of money received was not to be refused.

The allusion is here quite clear, and the date beyond doubt ; the treaty of Brétigny is meant, 1360. The king is Edward III. ; the "lordschupe," the crown of France, all rights to which Edward renounced at this time, in the most solemn manner. "And if we do," says he, in the charter he signed soon after, "cause or allow the contrary to be done—which God forbid—may we be held and reputed for false and disloyal, and may we encounter the blame and defame which a crowned king should encounter in such a case ; and we swear, on the body of Jesus Christ, these aforesaid things to keep, hold, and accomplish."³ The sum of money alluded to is the ransom of Jean - le - Bon, taken prisoner at Poitiers, three million crowns of gold ; the

¹ A. iii. 201. ² In which Chaucer had been taken prisoner.

³ "Et si nous faisons procurions ou souffrions être fait le contraire, —que Dieu ne veuille !—nous voulons être tenu et réputé pour mençongier et déloyal, et voulons encouurre en tel blâme et dif-fame comme roi sacré doit encourir en tel cas. Et jurons sur le corps Jésus-Christ les choses dites tenir, garder et accomplir." Calais, Oct. 24, 1360 ; Froissart, "Chronicles," chap. cdliv.

sufferings of the army are recounted at length by Froissart ; the "dim cloude" is that tempest which terrified the English host before Chartres, and putting the finishing stroke to their discouragement, hastened the conclusion of the peace : "For there happened to the King of England and to all his men a great miracle, he being before Chartres, that much humbled and broke his spirit. For . . . such a great and horrible storm came down from heaven upon the army of the king, that it seemed, truly, as if the end of the world were nigh ; for there fell from the sky, stones so big that men and horses were killed by them, and the boldest were amazed thereby. Therefore, the King of England looked towards the church of Our Lady of Chartres, and surrendered himself to Our Lady, and devoutly vowed and promised to her, as he has since declared and confessed, that he would agree to peace."¹ The return "hamward" began on the spot, for peace was signed in the village of Brétigny-lez-Chartres on the 8th of May, and we find Edward in England ten days later.

But there is evidence still more conclusive ; and, without speaking of the allusion to the disturbances caused

¹ "Car il avint [au roi d'Angleterre] et à toutes ses gens un grand miracle, lui étant devant Chartres, qui moult humilia et brisa son courage. Car . . . un orage si grand et si horrible descendit du ciel en l'ost du roi d'Angleterre que il sembla bien proprement que le siècle dût finir ; car il cheoit de l'air pierres si grosses que elles tuoient hommes et chevaux, et en furent les plus hardis tout ébahis. Et adonc regarda le roi d'Angleterre devers l'église Notre-Dame de Chartres et se rendit et voua à Notre-Dame dévotement et promit, si comme il dit et confessa depuis, que il s'accorderoit à la paix." Ibid., chap. CDLVI.

by the plague, which reappeared again about that time, 1361-62,¹ we find the description of a hurricane that had just taken place. Our visionary regards it as a token of divine wrath:

And this south-westerne wynt · on a Seterday at even
Was a-perteliche for pruide · and for no poynt elles.
Piries and plomtres · weore passchet to the grounde . . .
Beches and brode okes · weore blowen to the eorthe,
And turned upward the tayl.²

We read in the Continuator of Adam of Murimuth:
“A.D. 1362, xv die Januarii, circa horam vespertarum,
ventus vehemens, notus Australis Africus, tantâ rabie
erupit, quod flatu suo domos altas, ædificia sublimia,
turre, campanilia, arbores . . . violenter prostravit.”³
Both descriptions fit closely; the same tempest is
meant, the hour is the same, the wind comes from the
south; the Vision mentions that it took place on a
Saturday, and the 15th of January, 1362, fell on that
day of the week.⁴

¹ The visionary deplures, in his usual forcible way, the neglect into which have fallen the rites of matrimony, “seththen the pestilence,” A. x. 185. At another place, he speaks of “this pestilences,” A. v. 13, alluding to the two that had appeared in England, viz., in 1349 and 1361-2. ² A. v. 14.

³ “Adami Murimethensis Chronica,” London, 1846, p. 193.

⁴ The identification of this tempest is due to Tyrwhitt (see note in the Advertisement for the glossary of his edition of the “Canterbury Tales,” 1798). The date is 1362, even according to our way of reckoning, for the Continuator of Murimuth, instead of beginning his years in March, as many of his contemporaries did, begins them at Christmas. An account of the tempest, derived from the Continuator, is given under the same date by Walsingham, i. p. 296 (“Rolls”), and by the “Chronicon Angliæ,” p. 50

From all this we must conclude that the A text was written in 1362, or soon after.

II.

Most of the allusions contained in the first version are retained in the amplified texts of the poem, "B" and "C," in spite of the confusion which results from this. For instance, in the C text, certainly composed under Richard II., who was childless, Reason continues, as he did in the A text, to seat himself between the king and his son, by whom was primitively meant Edward III. and his son the Black Prince :

Corteisliche the kyng · thenne com to Resoun,
Bitwene himself and his sone · sette him on benche.¹

The author cared little for these discrepancies; we must note it now, once for all. But new allusions are found in the added passages of the B and C texts, and, thanks to them, we are enabled to date both.

[One of the most curious and interesting additions in the whole poem is that in the B text, consisting of the fable of the rats who wish to hang a bell about the cat's neck. This fable was famous, in England as well as France, during the Middle Ages. To take examples, we find it in England, in the Latin collection of Odo de Cheriton (early XIIIth century); in the series of moralised tales, written in French prose, about 1320, by ("Rolls"). The disaster was alluded to in Parliament. The Commons complain, in 1362, of "*diverses pestilences de vent, eawe et mortalité de gentz et de bestaille.*" "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. p. 269.

¹ A. iv. 31; cf. B. iv. 44, and C. v. 43.

the Franciscan, Nicol Bozon, who appears to have been a native of the north of England; and again in the huge volume,¹ compiled in Latin prose, by John of Bromyard, an English Dominican and a contemporary of the author of the *Visions*.²

"The mice," says Bozon, "held once their Parliament, and complained, the one to the other, of my Lord Bad, the white cat, that had destroyed their lineage, and busied himself with destroying them all.

"Says one: 'What shall we do with Sir Bad, that comes upon us privily, when we are enjoying ourselves, and causes us to run to corners for fear of his coming?'

"Says another: 'We shall hang a campernole (little bell) round his neck; and we shall hear it; thus shall we, at the same time, honour him with this ornament, and receive information of his coming.'

"Says each one to the other: 'Well said, indeed! thus shall we do! Let us now determine who shall perform what has been assented to.'

"Each and all declined. All said the counsel was a sound one, but none of them would have a hand in it. Thus went Bad much as before, destroying great and small.

"So it happens that many undertake, when assembled together, to amend the excesses of their rulers, but as soon as the ruler puts in an appearance: *Clym! clam! cat lep over dam!*"²

¹ I caused a copy of the book, preserved in the Paris National Library, to be weighed. Its weight was $14\frac{1}{2}$ lb. "*Summa Prædicantium*," Nuremberg, 1485, fol.

² "Les soricez tyndrent jadis leur parlement e se pleindrint

The subject was equally popular in France, where it was treated by the celebrated friend and admirer of Chaucer, Eustache des Champs, a contemporary of our poet :

Je treuve qu'entre les souris
Ot un merveilleux parlement, &c.¹

Our author in appropriating this fable, since immortalised by La Fontaine, takes care to inform us that it is not placed there simply for our amusement ; it has an

chescon à autre de mon sire Badde, le blanke chat, qe ont destruit lur lynage e se afforcea de eux destruire.

“Qe froms-nous, fit un, de sire Badde, qe vynt sur nous prive-ment quant nous sumez à nostre solaz e nous fet les angles quere pur poour de sa venue ?

“Fet un : Nous mettrons un campernole entour son col, q'il nus puisse par ceo garnir, e nus par taunt li honeroums e par ceo seroms de sa venue garniz.

“Com ceo est bien dit ! fet checun à autre. Hors tenons-nus à tant ; mès purveyons dunks meintenent qi fra ceste chose qe est purveue.

“Chescun de eux s'est escondü. Touz disient qe le conseil est seyn, mès nul ne voleit mettre la meyn. E Badde s'en ala com avant, e destruit petit e graunt.

“Auxint plusurs en compaignie promettent de amender les outragez des sovereynz, mès quant veient lur presence : *Glym ! clam ! cat lep ower dam !*”—“Les Contes moralisés de Nicole Bozon,” edited by L. Toulmin Smith and Paul Meyer, Paris, “Société des Anciens Textes,” 1889, 8vo, p. 144. The fable is aimed : *Contra pusillanimes prelatos et subditos*. See also Th. Wright, “Latin Stories,” 1842, Percy Society, “De Concilio Murium” : “Mures inierunt consilium qualiter a cato se præmuniri possent, et ait quædam sapientior cæteris,” &c., p. 80.

¹ Delboulle, “Les Fables de La Fontaine, additions à l'histoire des fables,” Paris, 1891, 8vo, p. 23.

important meaning, one dangerous perhaps to unfold :

What this meteles (dream) bemeneth · ye men that be merye,
Devine ye, for I ne dar · bi dere God in hevene.¹

The allusions are fortunately transparent ones. "With that," says the poet, abruptly as usual,

With that ran there a route · of ratones at ones,
And smale mys myd hem · mo then a thousande,
And comen to a conseil · for here comune profit ;
For a cat of a courte · cam whan hym lyked,
And overlepe hem lyghtlich · and lauhte hem at his wille,
And pleyde with hem perilouslych · and possed them aboute.

What to do? The poor rats no longer dare stir from their holes :

"Myghte we with any witte · his wille withstonde,
We myghte be lordes aloft · and lyven at oure esc."
A raton of renon · most renable of tonge,

evidently, like in *La Fontaine*, "leur doyen, personne très prudente," avails himself, as our visionary always does, of actual circumstances, and, alluding to the fashions of the day, exclaims :

"I have ysein segges" (beings), quod he · "in the cite of
London
Beren bighes (collars) ful brighte · abouten here nekkes,
And some colers of crafty werk ; uncoupled (unfastened) they
wenden
Bothe in wareine and in waste · where hem leve lyketh ;
And otherwhile thei aren ells-where · as I here telle.

¹ B. Prol. 208. See complete text in Appendix, II.

Were there a belle on here beigh · bi Ihesu as me thynketh,
 Men myghte wite where thei went · and awci renne !
 And right so," quod that ratoun · " reson me sheweth,
 To bugge a belle of brasse · or of brighte sylver,
 And knitten on a colere · for owre comune profit,
 And hangen it up-on the cattes hals (neck) · thanne here we mowen
 Where he ritt or rest · or renneth to playe."¹

All applaud ; the collar and the bell are bought ; but
 not a rat is found who, " for alle the rewme of Fraunce,"



"RATONS OF RENON."

(From the misericord of a stall at Great Malvern.)

or "all Engelerde to wyne," will consent to pass the collar over the cat's neck. And thus was "here labour lost, and alle here longe studye."

But, just as there are good men, so good mice, and one of them, a sagacious mouse, advances with a grave

¹ Cf. "Richard the Redeless," Skeat's Oxford edition, p. 610, lines 38, 44 :

They bare hem the bolder · ffor her gay broches . . .
 Thane was it ffoly · in ffeith, as me thynketh,
 To sette silver in signes · that of nought served.

air : and, contrary to the example of the ancient fabulists, the apologue continues, solely to fit in with the politics of the day. Folly ! cries the mouse ; folly to revolt :

Though we culled the catte · yut sholde ther come another ;

let us rather keep the one we have, and not infuriate him by exhibiting the bell ; think of what would happen were he to disappear :

For I herde my sire seyn · is sevene yere ypassed,
There the catte is a kitoun · the courte is ful elyng :
That witnisseth holiwrite · who-so will it rede.

Ve terre ubi puer rex est.

Let us then endeavour to live as peaceably as may be with our present master. And, besides, are we faultless, and would things go on so much better, supposing we had no master at all ?

For many mannus malt · we mys wolde destruye,
And also ye route of ratones · rende mennes clothes,
Nere (ne were) that cat of that courte · than can yow overlepe ;
For had ye rattes yowre wille · ye couthe nought reule youre-
selve. . . .

“ What this meteles (dream) bemeneth . . . devine ye ! ” Let us then divine.

[This allegory evidently corresponds to some turning point in English history : and ten or twelve years after the first text of the Visions was written, a crisis occurred in England which exactly corresponds to the fable of the counsel held by the rats, namely, the crisis of 1376-7.

Edward III., grown old and incapable, entirely ruled

by his mistress, Alice Perrers, plundered or allowed his favourites to plunder, the kingdom. The indignation caused by these ill practices manifested itself in that Parliament called "the Good," which sat, from the 28th of April, to the 6th of July, 1376. The assembly brought a long bill of complaints against royalty, drove away Alice Perrers, and denounced the misdeeds of prevaricating ministers. The Commons declared, through their speaker, Peter de la Mare, "that it seemed to them an undoubted fact, that, if their liege lord had always had, around him, loyal counselors and good officers, so would our same lord the king have been very rich in treasure, and therefore would not have had such great need of burdening his Commons, either with subsidy, talliage, or otherwise, considering the vast sums of gold that the ransoms of the kings of France and Scotland have brought into the kingdom. . . . And furthermore, that the kingdom of England is grievously impoverished, for the mere private profit and advantage of certain private persons round the king, and of their friends." ¹

At this conjuncture, the assembly devised means to

¹ "Lour semblaît pur chose véritable, qe si lour dit seignour lige eust euz toutdys entour lui des loialx conseillers et bons officers, meisme notre seigneur le Roy eust esté bien rychez de trésor, et partant n'eust mye grantement bosoigne de charger sa Commune par voie de subside ou de talliage, n'autrement, aiant considération as grandes sommes d'or q'ont esté apportez deinz le Roialme des ranceons des roys de France et d'Escoce. . . . Et puis distrent q'i lour semblaît auxint qe pur singuler profit et avantage d'aucuns privez entour le Roi et d'autres de lour covyne, si est le Roi et le roialme d'Engleterre grandement empovriz." "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. p. 323.

"bell the cat." The collar and bell were to consist in a council of a dozen lords, who were to exercise a general and minute watch over the business of the State, and of whom half the number had to be always near the king, "in such a manner that no important affairs should pass or be delivered without the assent and advice" of the entire council.¹ But scarcely was this institution established, when Parliament was dissolved. The court, through its mouthpiece, John of Gaunt, declared the acts of the late Parliament null;² the councilors were dismissed;³ Alice returned, and a new Parliament, the result of fraudulent elections,⁴ assembled on January 27, 1377, and finished demolishing the work of the Good. The speaker of the House of Commons, Peter de la Mare, that "raton of renon, most renable of tonge," spoken of by our visionary, was put in prison.⁵

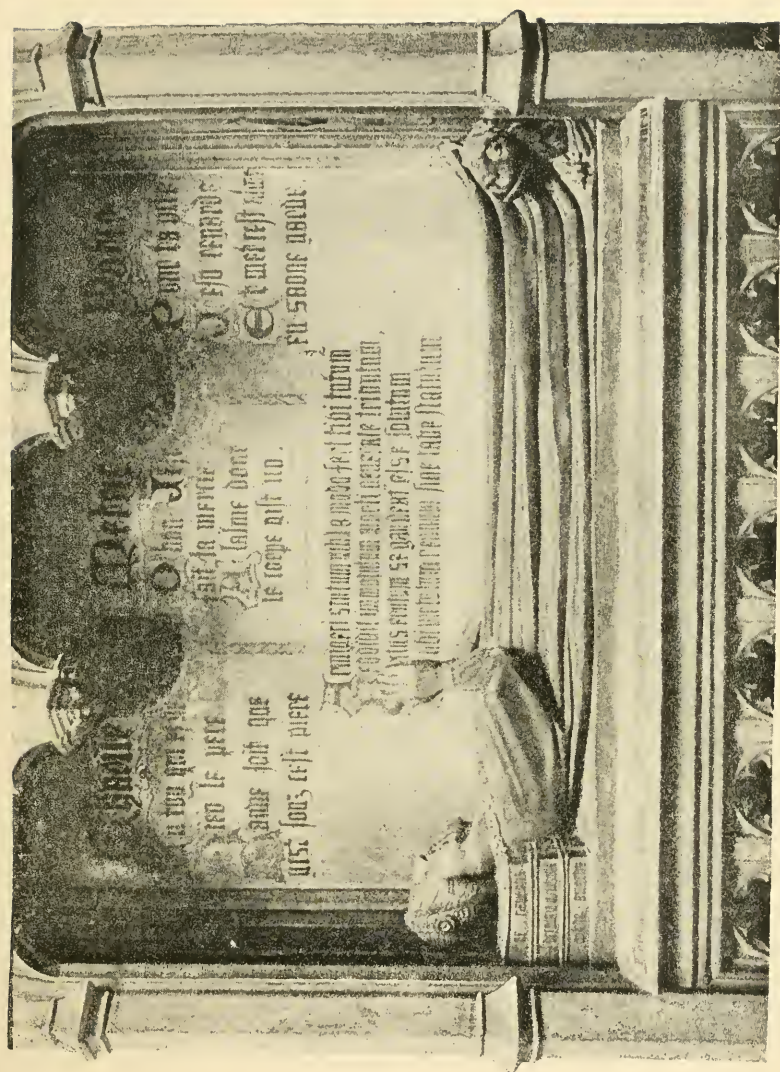
¹ "Par manière tielle que nulle groos bosoigne y passe ou soit delivers sanz l'assent et advis" of the council. "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 322.

² "Nec in rei veritate Parliamentum fuisse." "Chronicon Angliæ," ed. Maunde Thompson, London ("Rolls"), 1874, 8vo, p. 103.

³ From which arose endless maledictions: "Unde infinitas maledictiones super caput suum communis plebs conguessit in mentis amaritudine magna nimis." Ibid.

⁴ A dozen only among the members of the former House succeeded in thwarting the ill-will of John of Gaunt and the court, and were re-elected. Ibid., p. 112.

⁵ He had made before the assembled Parliament the above-mentioned speech. The importance of the part he played on this occasion is confirmed by the author of the "Chronicon Angliæ," who was in a position to be well informed, as the abbot of his monastery (St. Albans), Thomas de la Mare, sat in Parliament. The speech, as reported by the chronicler, is nearly the same as in the Rolls of Parliament: "Que omnia ferret æquanimiter [plebs communis] si



THE POET GOWER WITH A "COLERE ABOUTEN HIS NEKKE."
 From his tomb in St. Saviour's Church, Southwark.

The sagacious mouse (our poet himself) had therefore good reason to recommend prudence, and to dissuade Parliament from too strict a limitation of the royal power, for he feared the anarchy that would follow the disappearance of the court cat. Take heed, said he ; if the old cat is destroyed, we shall have for our king a kitten. This means that, at the time when the fable was written, Edward III. still lived, that his son, the Black Prince, who could not have been termed a kitten, was dead, and that Richard, aged ten, was heir to the throne. This important addition to the poem was therefore composed between June 8th, 1376, when the Black Prince died, and June 21st, 1377 (death of King Edward III.). The saying on the woes of kingdoms governed by a child, is quoted by the mouse from his father, who, "seven years" previously, had expressed his opinion on the subject. The remark was, at that time, a pertinent one : for in 1368-9, that is to say, seven or eight years before, the Black Prince's disease had suddenly increased in a terrible manner, and it had become evident he would never reach old age. Wise men could therefore say with anguish : "*Væ terræ ubi puer rex est !*"

The unceremonious way in which the mouse mentions the possibility of their putting the king to death may seem a little startling, but we must remember that the putting of kings to death was not then so very rare ; half the English kings in the XIVth century died a

dominus noster rex sive regnum istud exinde aliquid commodi vel emolumenti sumpsisse videretur. . . . Rationem compoti ab his qui [pecuniam] receperunt efflagitat plebs communis ; non enim est credibile regem carere infinita thesauri quantitate, si fideles fuerint qui ministrant ei." Ibid., p. 73.

violent death; the topic was not avoided in conversation; and Froissart could very well put in the mouth of the London citizens a sort of monologue that terminates thus: "There is no room amongst us for a redeless, sleepy king; we shall kill half a hundred of such (un demi cent), one after the other, till we get one according to our mind or liking."¹

All the other new allusions contained in the B text fit this same date of 1376-7, for they all refer to either anterior or contemporaneous events, but not to subsequent ones. The allusion to the drought of an April without rain that occurred in the year:

A thousande and thre hondreth · tweis thretty and ten,
 . . . whan Chichestre was maire,²

refers to the local famine of 1370. Endless wars between the Pope and his enemies, and between two Christian kings, are also alluded to:

Al the witt of this worlde · and wighte mennes strengthe
 Can nought confourmen a pees · bytwene the pope and his
 enemyes,
 Ne bitwene two Cristene kynges · can no wighte pees make,
 Profitable to ayther peple.³

These papal wars are mentioned by the Commons, in a petition drawn up by the Good Parliament of 1376: "Item, so soon as the Pope wants money to carry on his wars in Lombardy or elsewhere . . . he wishes to have

¹ "Nous n'avons que faire d'un roi endormit, ne pesant, qui trop demande ses aises et ses déduis. Nous en occirons avant un demi cent tout l'un apriès l'autre, que nous n'eussions un roi à nostre séance et volonté." "*Chroniques*," Luce's edition, vol. i. p. 249.

² B. xiii. 269.

³ B. xiii. 173.

subsidy from the clergy of England.”¹ The papal wars, here alluded to, were actual ones, and the remonstrance of the Commons was no vain complaint. His Holiness had, at that time, in his service, the famous Englishman, John Hawkwood, who worked wonders at the head of his “Holy Company.” In 1375, he levied contributions on Florence, Pisa, Sienna, Lucca, and Arezzo. In the year 1376, he retook Bologna which had revolted against the Pope, and laid Romagna waste. In February, 1377, he plunders Cesana and massacres the population. Then, considering he had worked long enough for the same cause, he passes into the Milanese camp, and now fights against the Pope, under the banner of Barnabo Visconti.²

The wars “bitwene two Cristene kynges” are those which continued or smouldered, between France and England. Even in time of peace, it was well known they were not at an end. All the wit of the world, said the poet, and the power of strong men proved inefficient to establish peace. And, in a similar fashion, the Bishop of St. David’s, chancellor of the kingdom, had, in his opening speech, delivered at the first sitting of the Parliament which assembled on January 27, 1377, insisted, before all things, on the necessity of granting ample subsidies, in view of the war with France : they

¹ “*Rotuli Parliamentorum*,” vol. ii. p. 339.

² This identification seems to me certain, and I do not believe that the allusion refers, as Mr. Skeat suggests (Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. 198), to the papal schism of 1378. His interpretation of the passage would alter the date of B, admitted by Mr Skeat himself. On this point, the poet thinks and speaks exactly as the Commons of the Good Parliament did ; and the wars of Hawkwood were more than enough to give rise to animadversions from both.

were, to be sure, in a state of peace, but this peace resembled war, and open war could not fail of soon breaking out. "His aforesaid adversary [of France]," observes the Bishop, "during these truces, and under their cover, makes great preparations for war, both by land and sea."¹ Therefore, let Parliament grant large sums of money.

To the same date, again, can be referred a certain change of tone in the good resolutions attributed to the king by the poet. In the A text, the king was represented as taking them with a good heart, meaning to keep them for a long time, for ever; he had, to all appearances, many years of life before him; he would have Reason to sit by him as long as he lived. In the B text, this passage is modified; the tone is different; the same resolutions are taken, but the time "*du long espoir et des vastes pensées*" is gone; Edward still wishes to have Reason by him for the remainder of his days; but that remainder will be a short one; he will accomplish reforms; at least he will, if he reigns any time:

Ac Resoun shal rekene with you * yif I regne any while.²

¹ "Sondit adversaire, pendantes celles trieves et souz umbre d'ycelles s'apparaille très fortement à la guerre, sibien par terre comme par meer." "Rot. Parl.," vol. ii. p. 361. On their side, the Commons of the Good Parliamēt had enumerated the grievances of England "q'est maintenant grevez en diverse manēre par pluseurs adversités, si bien par les guerres de France, d'Espagne, d'Irlande, de Guyenne et Bretaigne et ailleurs, come autrement." Ibid., p. 322.

² B. iv. 177. In A, he had said:

Bote rediliche, Reson * thou rydest not heonnes,
For as longe as I live * lette the I nulle.

A. iv. 153. The meaning, of a probably short space of time, that

This change of tone suits well the state of things we find in the year 1377, when the chronicles represent Edward as being no longer but the shadow of himself, "tanquam simulacrum . . . et pro multiplicibus ægritudinis incommodis loqui non valentem."¹

Some other allusions, of less importance, refer also to the same period. A new mention is made of the plague, which appears to have lately broken out again. Haukyn, "the actyf man," declares he has never received anything from the Pope, save a charter bestowing indulgences upon him, and adorned with a leaden seal showing "two pollis," that is, the heads of SS. Peter and Paul. He would have preferred something more practical, such as "a salve" for the pestilence; the Pope's blessing and his bulls would be very welcome, could they cure the "bocches" caused by the epidemic :

And I hadde nevere of him · have God my treuthe,
 Noither provendre ne parsonage · yut of the popis gifte,
 Save a pardoun with a peys of led · and two pollis amydde !
 Hadde ich a clerke that couthe write · I wolde caste hym a bille,
 That he sent me under his seel · a salve for the pestilence,
 And that his blessing and his bulles · bocches mighte destroye.²

I attribute to the words "any while" has been contested (Skeat, London edition, vol. iv. p. 882), but the poet uses the same words, with obviously the same meaning, at another place where the question is undoubtedly of an inevitable and near at hand catastrophe :

Ther nys cite under sonne · ne so riche reome
 Ther hue ys loved and lete by · that last shal eny while.

C. iv. 204.

¹ "Chronicon Angliæ," p. 132, sub anno 1377 ("Rolls").

² B. xiii. 244. The heads of SS. Peter and Paul were shown in relief on the Pope's leaden seal (bull).

Nothing, in all this, is imaginary ; the plague had reappeared in 1375 during the heat of an exceptional summer ; an "infinity of people" had died, and the Pope, whose charters could, doubtless, not cure the sick, had at least conceded, "per duas bullas," a plenary indulgence to those who died, duly confessed, during the epidemic.¹

One passage in our text is considered by Mr. Skeat to relate to the jubilee of Edward III., celebrated on the occasion of the fiftieth year of his reign. There occurs a description of a sort of golden age, foreseen by Conscience, for the time when Reason shall reign supreme. No more wars, says the poet ; no more quarrels ; peace and love shall reign on earth ; the happiness of all will be such, that the Jews will believe the Messiah has at length appeared.²

¹ "A.D. 1375. . . . Hoc anno erant calores nimii : pestilentia quoque pergrandis, tam in Anglia quam in aliis diversis mundi partibus, tunc temporis inolevit, quæ infinitos utriusque sexus subita morte consumpsit. . . . Durante ista epidemia dominus papa, ad instantiam cardinalis Angliæ, concessit omnibus decedentibus in Anglia, qui de peccatis suis contriti fuerunt et confessi, plenam remissionem, per duas bullas, sex mensibus duraturam." Continuator of Adam de Murimuth, "Chronica," London, 1846, 8vo, p. 217.

² I, Conscience, knowe this • for kynde witt me it taughte,
That resoun shal regne • and rewmes governe . . .

. . . such love shal arise,

And such a pees amonge the peple • and a perfit trewthe,
That Iewes shal wene in here witte • and waxen wonder
glade,

That Moises or Messie • be come in-to this erthe,
And have wonder in here hertis • that men beth so trewe . . .
Shal neither kynge ne knyghte • constable ne meire
Over-lede the comune • . . .

(Continued on p. 53.)

The date, it is true, corresponds to the period we are considering ; but the identification of the fact and the allusion to it, must, I believe, be discarded. Not only does the description offer nothing that precisely tallies with the jubilee of Edward III., but, above all, were this theory admitted, it would make out our author to be, in contradiction with all the rest of his work, a politician full of the most naïve illusions ; the judgment to be passed on him and his character would have to be completely altered.

In reality, he was too close an observer, and too well acquainted with his contemporaries and with mankind, to predict a golden age as being near at hand. That this anniversary was not one of wide significance, was only too apparent, even at the moment when the poet wrote. Chroniclers, like Walsingham and the Continuator of Adam of Murimuth, attach so little importance to the jubilee, that they do not even mention it.¹ The very work of the Parliament in the midst of which the jubilee was announced, the Parliament of 1377, that

Kynges courte and comune courte · consistorie and chapitele,
Al shal be but one courte · and one baroun be justice . . .
Batailles shal non be · ne no man bere wepne.

(B. iii. 282, 298, 313, 318.)

¹ They have nothing of the illusions which we should have to recognise in Langland, were the other theory the true one. The last years of Edward III. are thus summed up by Walsingham : "In hoc loco summe notandum est, quod sicut in ejus primordiis cuncta grata et prospera successive ipsum illustrem reddiderunt, et inclytum, ita, eo ad senilem ætatem vergente et ad occasum declinante, peccatis exigentibus, paulatim illa felicia decrescebant, et infortunia multa infausta et incommoda succrescebant, quæ minuere, proh dolor ! famam ejus." "*Historia Anglicana*," vol. i. p. 328 ("Rolls").

annulled the reforms of the Good Parliament, would have sufficed to undeceive the most sanguine. Nothing less resembles our poet's idyl, than the transactions which then took place. The chancellor, in the above-mentioned speech, demands, in the name of the king and on the occasion of the jubilee, as much money as possible. He demonstrates, with a superabundance of biblical quotations, that Edward III. is the beloved of God, and adduces two proofs of this : 1. There is a slight improvement in his health. 2. "And, besides, now is it that the fiftieth year of his reign has been accomplished ; from which we may gather that God loves him, and that he is blessed by God." There could not be, therefore, a better season for presents ; let the Commons be generous.¹ The Commons agree to the most unpopular grant of a poll-tax, a tax "hactenus inaudita," says Walsingham,² and demand, in exchange, an amnesty : a bargaining that in nowise recalls the Golden Age.³

¹ "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 361. The Commons themselves had set the example for such a bargaining, the year before. They had justified their petition for reforms by "l'an jubil, c'est assavoir l'an de grâce et de joie," 1376. Ibid., p. 338.

² Walsingham says that the Parliament of 1377 met "cogente Duce qui vices gerebat regis," and granted those taxes "hactenus inaudita." He adds : "In hoc autem Parlamento abrogata sunt statuta Parlamenti superioris quod *Bonum* merito vocabatur."

³ In defence of the contrary theory, Mr. Skeat has to suppose that the additions concerning the Golden Age, inserted in this passage (the beginning of which, however, is to be found also in the A text composed in 1362 : "resun schal regne . . . Schal no more Meede be mayster," &c., iii. 272) were written only after the accession of Richard. But this would, I think, only replace one improbability by another. Is it conceivable that the jubilee

The fable of the council held by the rats has, at all events, sufficiently shown how completely free from illusions was our poet. In fact, and with great reason, he places his Golden Age in some dim and undeterminate epoch; his prophecy is nothing more than a dream within a dream.

III.

In the C text, the new allusions are few, though the additions are numerous. The added passages are nearly all moralisations, reflections, and discourses; introspections of the author concerning his dreams and his past life. He tells us more about himself than formerly, and scruples less to confess his faults: the one is a proof that he is farther off from the time when they were committed; the other is a sign that old age is approaching.

Most of the former allusions are, however, maintained, and the judgments on the society of the time remain the same; the society the author has in his mind is that of his mature age, that of the last years of Edward III. The period 1376-1377 is the period on which turns this work, constantly gone over by its author, who incessantly altered it, for about thirty years.

The general tone of the principal additions inclines us to believe that a considerable number of years separates the second from the third version; but to what time exactly should we refer this last? We can be guided by the following indications.

of *Edward* would have caused our poet to prophesy a golden age for the time of Edward's *successor*? See Skeat, London edition, vol. iv. p. 882. Cf. *Revue Critique*, Oct. 25 and Nov. 1, 1879.

At one place, the visionary deals with the recruiting of the clergy, and declares that :

. . . Shold no clerk be crowned · bote yf he ycome were
Of franklens and free men · and of folke yweddede.¹

This remark may have been suggested by the abuse which the Commons complained of in 1391 : sons of peasants abandon the glebe, go to school, and are lost for their masters. The Commons, not very liberal, protest against this "promotion by clerkship," *avancement par clergie*.²

In the discourse where the knight Conscience puts forth his accusations against the beautiful Lady Meed, a few lines are added in the C text, exceedingly audacious ones, where it is said :

Ther nys cite under sonne · ne so riche reome
Ther hue ys loued and lete by (considered) · that last shal eny
while,
Withe-oute werre other wo · other wicked lawes,
And customes of covetyse · the comune to distruye.
Unsyttynge (unbecoming) Suffraunce · hure suster, and hure-
selve
Have maked al-most · bote Marie the helpe,
That no lond loveth the · and yut leest thyn owene.³

This addition is surely aimed at Richard II., and appears to correspond to the moment when, having become an absolute monarch, he lost all his popularity, and was hastening to his fall. The Parliament, a "prive parlement," says Langland in his forcible way,⁴

¹ C. vi. 63.

² "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. iii. p. 294.

³ C. iv. 204.

⁴ "Richard Redeless," iv. 25.

assembled at Shrewsbury on January 28, 1398, and, virtually resigning all power into the hands of the king, voted the principal taxes, not for a year, but for the prince's lifetime. Consequently, the sovereign will have henceforth no need for a parliament; these were assuredly, in the eyes of our visionary, "wicked lawes," and the reigning king was very different from the one sympathetically described in the B text:

Knyghthod hym ladde,
Might of the comunes * made hym to regne.¹

The time of "wicked lawes" had come; that of civil troubles was nigh;² the nation separates from Richard; discontent is expressed with increasing audacity. The king is dictatorial, the nation resolute; a crisis is inevitable, and soon comes.

This allusion is the most recent one to be found in text C, and, on this account, we may conclude that the final revision of the poem took place in 1398 or shortly after.³

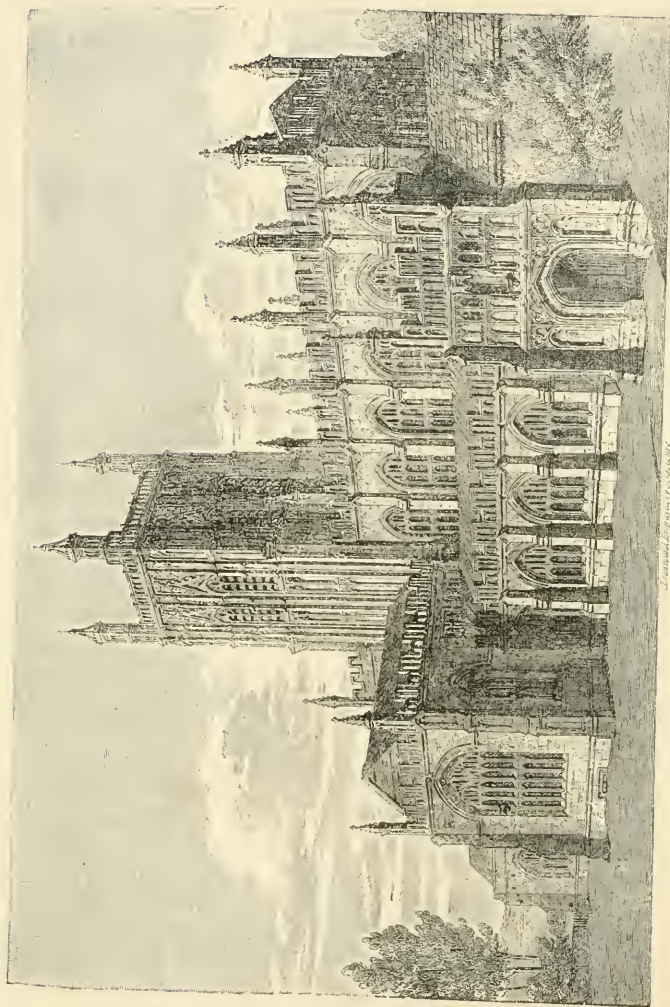
¹ B. Prol. 112.

² Those fears began to be entertained in the summer of 1397: "For fear of a popular rising, an army was levied in Cheshire and other royalist counties." Stubbs, "Constitutional History," Oxford, 1880, vol. ii. p. 538.

³ See, *contra*, Mr. Skeat's Oxford edition (vol. ii. pp. xxxi. and xxxv.), where a different date, viz., 1392-3, is proposed. According to Mr. Skeat, Langland alludes here to the quarrel of Richard with the Londoners in 1392, which would give the date 1393 or thereabout for the C text. But this local quarrel does not fit so well the lines of the poet as the more important events of the years 1397-8. It was, not long after, solemnly composed; one of the most splendid pageants on record took place on the occasion,

The probable dates of the three versions are therefore A. 1362-3, B. 1376-7, C. 1398-9.

August 29, 1393, a full description of which has been preserved ("De concordia inter regem et civitatem," by Richard of Maidstone. Wright, "Political Poems," vol. i. p. 282, "Rolls"). Mr. Skeat's identification is the more difficult to accept, as, from the day when he took the reins of government in his hands, May 3, 1389, till 1397, Richard was generally popular throughout the country: "He lived then as a constitutional king and did his best" (Stubbs, "Constitutional History," Oxford, 1880, vol. ii. p. 530); the kingdom enjoyed peace; parliamentary institutions worked regularly. The situation darkened when Richard remarried, 1396, but it became threatening only the year after. We are the more at liberty to accept the date 1398-9, as Mr. Skeat himself adds to his demonstration in favour of 1393: "I should not object to the opinion that the true date is later still."



Engraved by Wm. G. Smith

Abbey of St. Albans, England

A.D. 1820.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUTHOR'S NAME, LIFE, AND CHARACTER.

I.

NO contemporary has spoken of the author of the Visions, and no one seems to have known him ; but, while studying carefully his poem, we can discern the traits of his character, and the outline of his biography, for he has described his person and way of life, and said what he thought of both, in his work. He spent his existence in remodelling his poem, and so identified himself with it, that he and it are one. He has drawn there his moral and even his physical portrait.

His Christian name was William, as is attested by the title of several manuscripts: "Incipit visio Willelmi"; moreover, the personages of his Visions, when they speak to him, always address him as William :

A loveliche lady of lere (face) · in lynnyn y-clothid,
Cam down fro that castel · and calde me by name,
And seide, "Wille, slepest thou · syxt thou this puple ?" ¹

His surname appears to have been Langland (or Long-

¹ C. ii. 3 ; C. xi. 71, &c.

lond, which is a different form of the same). Tradition is in favour of this name, and tradition is represented, firstly, in the XVth century, by annotations inscribed in some manuscripts by ancient possessors of them ;¹ secondly, in the XVIth century, by John Bale. In his "Catalogue of illustrious writers," Bale affirms² that "Langelande" composed the "Visionem Petri Aratoris," commencing : "In æstivo tempore, cum sol caleret," which is indeed the beginning of our poem :

In a somer sesun ' whon softe was the sonne ;

thirdly, there happens to be in a line of the Visions

¹ See Skeat's Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. xxviii.

² Bale's notice (in which several erroneous statements are to be found, e.g., our poet's Christian name, Robert, his Wyclifism, &c.) is as follows : "Robertus Langelande, sacerdos, ut apparet, natus in comitatu Salopiæ, in villa uulgò dicta Mortymers Clibery, in terra lutea, octauo a Maluernis montibus milliarius fuit. Num tamen eo in loco incondito et agresti, in bonis literis ad maturam ætatem usque informatus fuerit, certò adfirmare non possum, ut neque an Oxonii aut Cantabrigiæ illis insudauerit : quum apud eorum locorum magistros studia præcipue vigerent. Illud uerumtamen liquido constat eum fuisse ex primis Ioannis Vuicleui discipulis unum atque in spiritus feruore, contra apertas Papistarum blasphemias aduersus Deum et eius Christum sub amœnis coloribus et typis edidisse in sermone anglico pium opus, ac bonorum uirorum lectione dignum, quod uocabat Visionem Petri Aratoris.—Lib. i. In æstiuo tempore, cum sol caleret.

"Nihil aliud ab ipso editum noui. In hoc opere erudito, præter similitudines uarias et iucundas, prophetice plura prædixit, quæ nostris diebus impleri uidimus. Compleuit suum opus anno Domini 1369, dum Joannes Cicestrius Londini prætor esset."—"Sciptorum illustrium maioris Brytannie. . . Catalogus," Basel, 1557 ? fol., p. 474.

a succession of words which, put together, give, in a reversed order, the name of William Langland :

I have lyved in *londe*, quod I · my name is *longe Wille*.¹

It seems likely that this is more than a mere accident ; the poets of that time liked to play upon names, and often gave theirs to be divined in easy enigmas. Chaucer calls Olivier de Mauny, "The Wikked Nest."² Christine de Pisan, who does not appear to have expected much of the acuteness of her readers, facilitates things for them, and writes :

S'aucun veut le nom savoir,
Je lui en diray tout le voir :
Qui un tout seul *cry* crieroit
Et la fin d'Aoust y mectroit,
Si il disoit avec une *yne*,
Il sauroit le nom bel et digne.³

"If any wants to know the name, I shall tell him the truth of it. Let him cry one *cry*, and add to it the end of August, and then say one *yne* (hymn) : then will he know the good fine name."³

In a brilliant sketch published in the *North British Review*,⁴ Dr. Pearson has tried to prove that the poet's name was Langley, though tradition is opposed to this hypothesis, and the name is not to be found in any manuscript. He grounds his theory principally on a

¹ B. xv. 148.

² "Monkes tale," "De Petro Hispanie Rege." We owe this identification to Mr. Skeat.

³ Paulin Paris, "Manuscripts français de la Bibliothèque du Roi," vol. v. p. 170.

⁴ April, 1870, p. 241.

note in the handwriting of the XVth century, inscribed in a manuscript of the Visions preserved at Dublin. This note has given rise to many contestable theories, and is thus worded :

“Memorandum quod Stacy de Rokayle, pater Willielmi de Langland, qui Stacius fuit generosus, et morabatur in Schiptone under Wicwode, tenens domini le Spenser in comitatu Oxon, qui prædictus Willielmus fecit librum qui vocatur Perys Ploughman.”¹

According to this note, the author of *Piers Plowman* was the son of a sort of franklin or freeholder, a dependent of the family of Spenser, living at Shipton-under-Wychwood, in the county of Oxford. Mr. Pearson says that no family of the name of Langland has left any trace in the vicinity, but Langleys are there known, and there is a hamlet of that name. If, as is the case, Stacy's son did not take the name of his father, he must have adopted that of his village and called himself Langley, after the locality.

Everything in this theory is hypothesis, and tradition contradicts it. Concerning the man himself, the very note of the Dublin manuscript gives the name of Langland ; concerning the village, no evidence connects the poet with a village of Langley. One only authority, that we might, it is true, wish weightier and more ancient, but which is better than nothing, mentions the place where our visionary is supposed to have been born. This is John Bale, who tells us he was born at Cleobury Mortimer, in the county of Shrewsbury, not far from Malvern in the county of Worcester, where the opening scene of the Visions is laid.

¹ Ibid., p. 242, and Skeat, Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. xxviii.

"Langley" remains, therefore, a pure hypothesis;¹ and, for a hypothesis to be resorted to instead of tradition, it would at least have been necessary to find tradition supplying data irreconcilable with facts known for certain to be true; but this is not the case. Tradition supplies us with "Langland" as being the poet's name, and "Cleobury Mortimer" as his birthplace; the fact of the poet receiving his name, though it be that of a locality, without having been born there, can be easily explained. Places of this name exist in several counties of England (Somerset, Devon, Dorset), and various ties—that of habitation, &c.—may have bound him to one of them, and been the cause of this surname. Cases of this kind were frequent in the Middle Ages. The chronicler Matthew of Paris, Matthæus Parisiensis, though English, was so called merely because he had studied at Paris. If, therefore, "Langley" is a possibility, "Langland" is also a possibility, and one that is corroborated by tradition.

The note of the Dublin manuscript has given rise to other disputable suppositions. It makes out the poet's father to be a kind of personage; he is "generosus," that is, of "good family," a sort of franklin like Chaucer's, "generosus, gentylman," says an Anglo-Latin glossary of the XVth century.² Our poet would therefore have had a certain social rank. In reality, his


¹ Cf. the explanation proposed in the *Athenæum*, March 19, 1887, where it is suggested that there existed probably a Stacy de Rokyle who had a son called William Langley. The author of the Dublin note mistook, as it seems, this William for ours.

² Wright and Wülker, "Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies," London, 1884, 8°, p. 630: "Nativus, bondeman; generosus, gentylman."

origin is, I believe, far more humble, and we must on this point hear what he has to say himself.

First, and this, to tell the truth, can be better felt than shown, the tone of the poem contradicts, from beginning to end, the theory that the writer was a man of any social standing. Neither Gower, Chaucer, nor Wyclif talks thus. All the remarks of the author, all his judgments, all his reminiscences concerning himself, that is, everything that gives tone and colouring to the poem from the point of view that now occupies us, agrees with the supposition that he was a child of low degree, but of vivacious parts, who, thanks to patrons pleased by his ready intelligence, was able to study, to become a clerk, to break the bonds of servitude, and, in some manner or other, reach freedom. We perceive him to be, by merit, far superior to the modest rank he occupies, and to which, however humble, he has only attained by favour, if not even by illegitimate means. His language is such as the vexations and disappointments of an abortive career might dictate to one of those peasants' sons, against whom the Commons petitioned, who left their village, obtained access to the schools, and got afterwards an "avancement par clergie."¹

To confirm these impressions, we have some important declarations of his. In the poem, Holy-Church meets Langland and reminds him of her benefactions :

 Ich under-feng (received) the formest * and fre man the made.²

Entrance into the Church did in fact abolish servitude. It is true, the law required a manumission by the

¹ Year 1391. See above, p. 56.

² C. ii. 73.

master ;¹ but fraud was frequently resorted to, and, by means of false witnesses, the serf received ecclesiastical orders. A rule, not easy of application, prescribed that, in such a case, the culprit should be degraded, and brought back to a state of servitude, should the deceit be proved.² Many sons of peasants thus discovered in themselves a religious vocation, so as to obtain their freedom, and, once assured of it, showed great slackness in the performance of their ecclesiastical duties. The case was again provided for : any individual liberated under these conditions, "*qui canonicas horas observare et psallere noluerit, dicens se liberum esse,*"³ should be excommunicated until he submitted. These ancient decrees, frequently violated during the XIIIth century, were still oftener infringed in the course of the XIVth, owing to the general disorder resulting from the great plague.⁴

Whether the means employed were perfectly regular or not, it was to Holy-Church that Langland owed his liberty. It does not seem that she here speaks figu-

¹ "*Inhibitum est enim et in Decretalibus statutum, quod nullus Episcopus spurios aut servos, donec a dominis suis fuerint manumissi, ad sacros ordines promovere præsumat.*" "*Fleta,*" ii. cap. 51.

² "*Si quis vero servus, dominum suum fugiens et latitans, vel testibus adhibitis conductis et munere corruptis, aut quacumque calliditate vel fraude ad gradus ecclesiasticos pervenerit, decretum est ut deponetur et dominus ejus cum recipiat in servitutem.*" "*Fleta,*" *ibid.*

³ "*Fleta,*" ii. cap. 51.

⁴ The authorities were the less inclined to severity as the ranks of the clergy had been greatly thinned by the plague ; so much so that the Pope had to grant special facilities for the recruiting of ecclesiastics. See letter of Clement VI. to the Archbishop of York, authorising supplementary ordinations, "*Historical Papers . . . from the Northern Registers,*" ed. Raine ("Rolls"), p. 401.

ratively, and alludes to baptism, a benefit common to all Christians ; she reminds Langland of what she has done for him personally :

“ Holychurche ich am,” quath huc · “ thow oghtest me to knawe ;
Ich under-feng the formest · and fre man the made.
Thow broghtest me borwes · my bydding to fulfille,
To leve on me and lovye me · al thy lyf tyme.”¹

Given that Langland had really received, as will be seen, at least the minor orders, or in any case the tonsure, no wonder that Holy-Church, while commemorating her favours, would rather allude to the personal advantages conferred upon the poet and to the pledges taken by him, in his own name, than to the usual pledges, common to all Christians, taken, not by them indeed, but by third persons, the godfathers and godmothers acting *pro forma*, at the moment of the baptism. Let us observe, besides, that the words, “ Ich . . . fre man the made,” are to be found only in the C text ; the older versions, A and B, have only the less important statement : “ I taught thee thy faith,”

Ich the undurfong furst · and thi feith the taughte.²

And it is one of the characteristics of the C text that the author becomes more precise in what he has to say about himself, and readier to take us into his confidence. This observation must incline us to see more in the “ fre man the made,” than if it was found in the three versions of the poem ; it has the appearance of being one more fragment of the poet’s confession.

If it is objected that Holy-Church is thus made to use very practical language, concerning very material

¹ C. ii. 72.

² A. i. 74.

interests, I can only reply that Holy-Church and "Clergye" were very practical indeed in the Middle Ages. The most pious authors, who represent them as uttering their own apology, always put into their mouths the enumeration of the material privileges they confer. Thanks to the tonsure he has received from Holy-Church, a clerk escapes hanging for his misdeeds. He shows the traces of it, and proves that he can read, and he is safe: "A book is brought in, not an unknown one . . . What a useful reading, this reading of the book of Psalms, a Book of Life, if any ! . . . Our pupil reads a few lines and, avoiding the rigours of the secular arm, is trusted to the keeping of the Bishop."¹ Thus speaks Clergye in the "Philobiblon" (year 1345). In the same way, we see, at another place, in the Visions, that Clergye

. . . has take fro Tybourne 'twenti strong theves
There lewed theves ben lolled up' loke how thei be saved !²

¹ "The Philobiblon of Richard de Bury," ed. Thomas ; London, 1888, 8°. "Legendus liber porrigitur non ignotus . . . O lectio pretiosa psalterii quæ meretur hoc ipso liber vitæ deinceps appellari . . . Noster alumnus ad lectionem unicam libri vitæ pontificis commendatur custodiæ, et rigor in favorem convertitur." Clerks, naturally enough, took great care not to allow such a useful privilege to be infringed. When there was any occasion, they complained to the king, saying: "Item se plaignent voz ditz chapelleins que vos Justices, par lour juggement dampnent et juggent clerics, chapelleins, moignes et autres gentz de religion portantz tonsure et habit acordantz a lour estat . . . et les font pendre et treiner as coues des chivalx, en reprove de Seinte Eglise et de la clergie." And justices carry the wickedness so far as to allow monks to hang longer on the gallows than lay people. "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 244, year 1351-2.

² B. xii. 190.

There is, therefore, nothing astonishing that Holy-Church should boast of being able to free the son of a serf.

This interpretation is corroborated by another passage of the poem. Weary in body, vacillating in spirit, dreaming his dreams, disdaining manual labour, "romynge in remembraunce," Langland meets Reason, who reproaches him with his indolence: Why not make thyself useful? And among the different ways of so doing, Reason enumerates various labours in town and country: mowing, reaping, sheaving, shaping of shoes and clothes, tending of sheep, pigs, and geese:

"Thenne havest thou londes to lyve by" · quathe Reson,
 "other lynage ryche
 That fynden the thy fode?"¹

Langland shows, by his answer, that he has neither lands nor rich relations; and yet he does nothing, he refuses "to cart and to worche," or to ply a trade. And what motive does he allege for this refusal? Had he been the son of a "gentylman," of a "generousus," his birth would have been sufficient excuse; all the more so that Reason himself suggests this answer: "Havest thou . . . lynage riche?" It is even scarcely credible that, in such a case, Langland would have represented Reason putting the question at all. "Why don't you cut shoes?" is not a likely question for Reason to ask the son of a "gentylman." But no; being thus "arated," the poet gives a long moody answer, a mixture of doleful disquisitions and pungent sayings, in which he justifies his dreamy life and his

¹ C. vi. 26.

refusal to work with his hands, by the fact of his being tonsured. It is the tonsure and nothing else that dispenses him from the labours of a peasant, and frees him from the necessity of having "to cart and to worche."¹

In the course of his rambling speech, full of fits and starts, full of tears also, and sneers, where absolute consistence is the last thing that may be expected, he adds this, of which a great deal has been made :

Hit by-cometh for clerkus · Crist for to serven,
And knaves uncrowned · to cart and to worche.
For shold no clerk be crowned · bote yf he ycome were
Of franklens and free men · and of folke yweddede.²

From this it has been concluded that Langland "ycome was of franklens." But, taken in conjunction with the rest of the poem, this, I believe, can scarcely mean anything but : Behold my tonsure, you have no right to carry your inquiries further ; if I wear it, you must needs take me for a free man, and I have not to submit to manual labour. From whatever side you consider the matter, my tonsure suffices ; I wear it, therefore I need not work.

This interpretation can of course be contested, and it has been. Perhaps, however, it will not be considered unacceptable if the whole of the poem, its tone and the light it throws on Langland's life are considered. For the reader ought to remember, that, as will be

¹ C. beginning of passus vi. He alleges some other motives, but merely physical ones : he is "to waik to worche" and "to long . . . lowe for to stoupe," but the only reason of a social order he puts forth is his clerkship.

² C. vi. 61.

shown further on, the poet's character is not a straight, clear, logical one. If some deny the above theory, under the plea that, to admit it, means that the author of the Visions could, at the same time, strongly condemn certain abuses, while deriving himself a benefit from them, the answer is : Quite so ; and it is *a fact*, that our writer was such a man.

In the particular case now under examination (and many others might be pointed out¹), the poet well knows that the rule put forward by him, to rid himself of Reason and his reproaches, is not always followed ; according to our surmises, he for one had probably violated it. He avails himself of the advantages conferred on him by the tonsure, since circumstances have allowed of his receiving it. Is this right ? Surely not, answers Langland ; great disorder prevails on this point, as on many others :

. . . Bondemenne barnes · han be mad bisshopes,
And barnes bastardes · han ben archidekenes,
And sopers and here sones · for selver han be knyghtes.²

¹ He blames those who go to London and sing for souls, yet he confesses that he does the same. He blames people of a wandering habit, yet he is a wanderer ; he heaps scorn on the men who seek for invitations at the houses of the great, yet he does so ; he condemns "tho that feynen hem folis" (B. x. 38), and he assumes the appearance of a "fole" ; he hates lazy people, "lorels," "lolleres," yet he lives himself as a lorel, a loller, "a spille-tyme,"

and lovede wel fare

And no dede to do · bote drynke and to slepe.

(C. vi. 8.)

² C. vi. 70. From the time of Henry III. English kings left no choice in this matter to their subjects ; all those who had a

In blaming this abuse, he shares the opinion of the Commons of England, with whom, in fact, he rarely disagrees ; so much so that his work has, at times, the appearance of a poetical commentary on the Parliament Rolls : " Item beg the Commons that it be ordained and commanded, that no bondman or villein should put his children henceforth to school, in order to advance them by clerkship (clergie), and this for the maintenance and salvation of the honour of all free-men of the realm." ¹ Such boys would, of course, after having thus begun life, find themselves in a false situation in the world, and the object of obloquy. Everything Langland says about himself and his ways of life betrays, as we shall see, the false situation in which he had to remain.

To cross, in this manner, the line between the two classes, some help from the outside must have been in most cases necessary ; left to his own resources, a bondman would have had great difficulty in providing

certain revenue were bound to become knights. The subjects were very slack in claiming this favour, the reason being the obligations (military service, aids, &c.) which they had then to face. Under Henry III., any landowner, deriving £20 revenue from his land, had to become a knight ; under Edward III. the sum was £40. See writ of Edward III. to the Sheriffs of London, asking for the names of all the citizens who possess such revenues and have not thought fit to ask for knighthood. It is prescribed that all of them "*ordinem suscipiant militare.*" "*Liber Albus*," p. 190 ("Rolls").

¹ "*Item priont les Communes de ordeiner et comander que null neif ou vileyn mette ses enfantz de cy en avant à escoles pour eux avancer par clergie, et ce en maintenance et salvation de l'honneur de toutz frankes du roialme.*" "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. iii. p. 294, year 1391.

“clergie” for his “barn.” Patrons prepossessed by the good qualities of the boy, must, in most cases, have proffered a helping hand. This happened to Langland, according to his own testimony :

“Whanne ich yong was,” quathe ich · “meny yer hennes,
My fader and my frendes · founden me to scole,
Tyl ich wiste wyterliche · what holy wryte menede.”¹

He had thus been early prepared to “advance by clerkship.” For this, the co-operation of friends had been necessary, and his father alone could not have done it. In fact, friends played the principal part in his life at this period: hence the infinite gratitude he bears them, and the endless grief which filled his soul at their death :

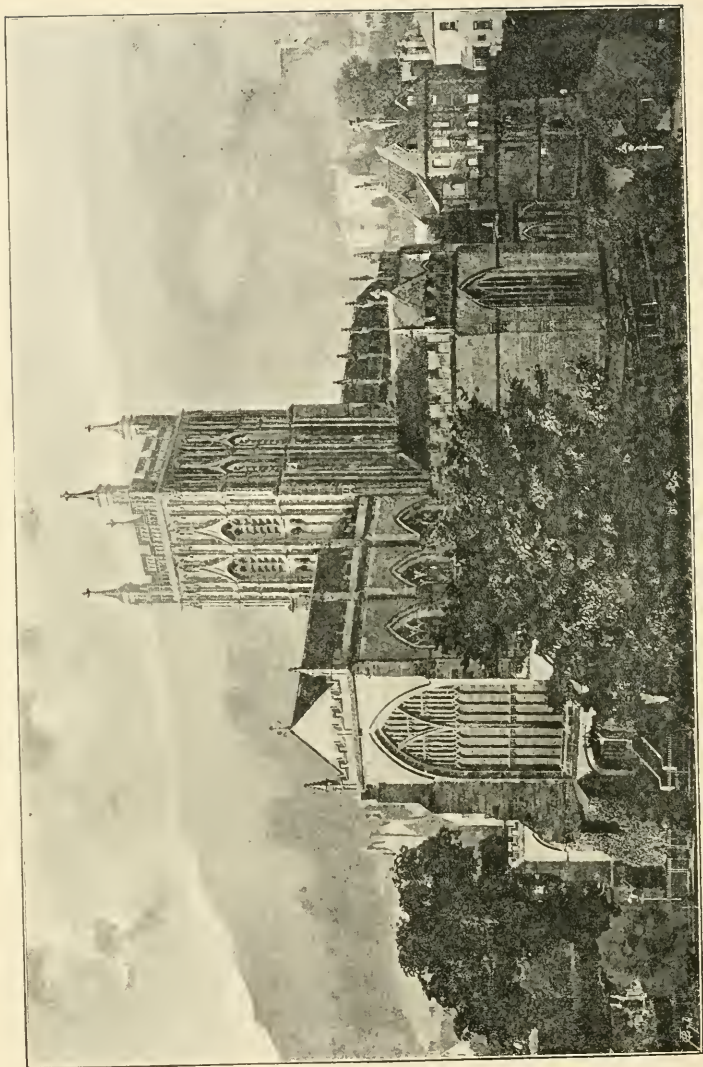
And yut fond ich nevere in faith · sytthen my frendes deyden,
Lyf that me lyked · bot in thes longe clothes.²

To sum up : 1. The tone of Langland seems to betray a low extraction ; 2. He says that Holy-Church a “free man him made” ; 3. That, if he does not work as a workman, as he should, the reason is that he has received the tonsure (*not* that his birth exempts him) ; 4. It is a fact that bondmen’s sons went to school and got their freedom in this way ; 5. This case is not the only one in which Langland condemns what he considers an abuse, while at the same time availing himself of it ; 6. His father alone would have been unable to provide for his schooling³ ; 7. His

¹ C. vi. 35.

² C. vi. 40.

³ The conclusions of the critic who has given most attention to the Dublin MS., where Langland’s father is spoken of as “generosus,” differ very little from this: “We are reduced



THE PRIORY CHURCH AT GREAT MALVERN.
Actual state.

remarks about himself, as we are going to see, betray the false situation in which he was placed in after life.

So long, therefore, as no new elements are produced for the solving of the problem, the examination of all the material now available leads us to conclude that our poet, called William Langland, was of low extraction, and probably born at Cleobury Mortimer.

The date of his birth can be ascertained with some degree of probability. In the B text, Ymagynatyf says to him :

I have folwed the in feithe · this fyve and fourty wyntre.¹

This text belonging to the year 1376-7, Langland must have been born about 1331-2.

II.

His mode of life, his tastes, his character are clearly indicated in his poem. We can, thanks to the work, picture to ourselves the poet as follows.

When quite young, he had, as we have seen, been placed at school by his father and by friends. His life oscillated principally between Malvern and London. Even when residing in the latter town, his thoughts therefore," says Dr. Pearson, "to supposing that the Langley we seek for was a subtenant of the Burnels; and this assumption of an obscure origin agrees altogether best with what we should naturally conjecture of the poet's antecedents" (*North British Review*, 1870, p. 244).

¹ B. xii. 3. Cf. B. xi. 46. In the C text, the line is preserved, but it is appropriately worded in a different and vaguer way :

"Ich have yfolwed the in faith · more than fourty wynter."
(C. xv. 3.)

turn to Malvern, to its hills and verdure ; he imagines himself there, for tender ties, those ties that bind man to mother earth, and which are only formed in childhood, endear the place to him. While pacing Cornhill and Cheapside, he was wont to see—what is *not* to be seen there—what “poor Susan” saw, many a century later :

She sees

A mountain ascending, a vision of trees ;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows through the vale of Cheapside . .

She looks, and her heart is in heaven : but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade :
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.¹

If it is alleged (as it has been) that this is making too much of Malvern, when the place is named only four times by name in the Visions,² the answer will be that, to name it at all, Langland must have been deeply under the spell of the place. Nothing is less usual for the poets of the time, than to specify the localities where they dream their dreams on a May morning. Gower lies on the ground in “a swote grene pleine,” any plain in the world. Good Chaucer, with his practical turn of mind, does not like much to lie on the grass, and usually goes to bed. He goes to bed, to dream of the “House of Fame” :

Whan hit was nyght, to slepe I lay
Ryht ther as I was wont to done.

¹ Wordsworth, “The Reverie of Poor Susan,” 1797.

² C. i. 6 and 163 ; vi. 110 ; x. 295.

He dreams of the "Duchesse," while sitting in his "bedde." When he intends listening to the debates of the assembled "Foules," he cautiously retreats to his room :

And to my bed I gan me for to dresse.

He risks, it is true, a sleep in the open air, in the "Legende of Goode Women," but he does it obviously to submit to fashion, and while so doing, he takes some little precautions. He sleeps

. . . in a litel herber that I have.

Where was it? He does not say. There again "a bed" was dressed for him. Such wants are unknown to Langland :

On Malverne hulles

Me byfel for to slepe · for weyrynesse of wandryng ;

and later, in the course of the poem, he finds himself there again, hungry and moneyless :

Ich awook · and waitede (looked) aboute,

And seih the sonne in the south · sitte that tyme.

Meteles (meatless) and moneyles · on Malverne hulles,

Musynge on this meteles (dream) · a myle-wey ich yeod
(went).¹

* A convent, belonging to the Benedictine order, and a school formerly existed at Malvern, and there, in all likelihood, Langland first studied.) Even before the Conquest, there had been at this place "quoddam heremitorium," in which St. "Werstan" had flourished, one

¹ C. x. 293.

of the most shadowy names in the very shadowy calendar of Saxon saints. The island was then so blessed with saints, observed a chronicler of the Norman times, that you could scarcely pass a village of importance, without hearing the name of a local holy man and unknown saint.¹

To come to more solid ground, we know for certain that Aldwin, the monk and hermit, began the priory church about 1084. A miraculous prophecy had caused him to do so. He was leading the life of hermits at Malvern, "*in vastissimo illo saltu quod Malvernum vocatur,*" when he felt greatly tempted, after a conversation with Guido his companion, to go to the East, "where he might, either see the Sepulchre of God, either meet a happy death at the hands of the Saracens." Before, however, undertaking the journey, he went for counsel to Wulfstan, the famous Saxon Bishop of Worcester. "Do not go anywhere, please, Aldwin," said the Bishop, "but remain where you are. You would be astonished, were you to know what I know, and what God intends to do there through you."² Aldwin returns to Malvern; devotees flock to him in considerable numbers; there are soon more than three hundred of them; supplies of all sorts are forwarded to him by the good people of the country, and then

¹ "*Quid dicam de tot episcopis, heremitis, abbatibus? nonne tota insula tantis reliquiis indigenarum fulgurat ut vix aliquem vicum insignem prætereas ubi novi sancti nomen non audias? Quam multorum etiam periit memoria pro scriptorum inopia!*" William of Malmesbury, "*Gesta Regum Anglorum*," London, 1840, 2 vols. 8vo, vol. ii. p. 417.

² William of Malmesbury, "*Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*," London ("Rolls"), 1870, p. 287.

he lays the foundations of the great church. A long succession of priors came after him ; Thomas de Legh and John de Painswick ruled the convent when our poet lived, as it seems, at Malvern.¹

Now, as then, the place is beautiful. Behind the town, lie the hills where Langland loved to wander ; in places, is seen, amid the grass, the red earth and sandstone of which they are formed ; their summits and hollows become gradually blue as the mist falls.

From the top, an immense verdant plain can be descried, furrowed by streams bordered with trees ; the shadows and sunshine of an ever varying sky illumine the brooks and soften the outline of the woods ; the huge pile of Worcester cathedral rises to the left, in the midst of the plain ; from the height of "Herefordshire beacon," crowned with the well-preserved earthworks of a Roman camp, the soft undulations of the Welsh country are discovered. The plain is the same "feir feld," spoken of by the poet, a vast expanse where all humanity can assemble, like in the

¹ See list of priors in James Nott, "Some of the Antiquities of 'Moche Malverne,'" Malvern, 1885, 8vo, p. 95. The name of Malvern is thus commented upon by William of Malmesbury : "Incevit etiam nostris diebus in eadem provintia Malvernense monasterium, quod mihi per antifrasin videtur sortitum esse vocabulum. Non enim ibi male, sed bene et pulcherrime religio vernat, ubi ad immortalitatem spem et commodum mortalium rerum penuria monachos trahit et animat." "Gesta Pontificum Anglorum," *ibid.* p. 296. A variety of documents relating to Malvern will be found in W. Thomas, "Antiquitates prioratus Majoris Malverne . . . cum chartis originalibus," London, 1725, 8vo, and Nash, "Collections for the History of Worcestershire," London, 1781, 2 vols. fol., vol. ii. pp. 121 *et seq.*

Valley of Jehoshaphat. The hills, which slope westward, to-day studded with jessamine and rose-wreathed villas, were then desert. In this "wilde wilderness, and bi a wode-syde," the poet used to walk, brooding over his thoughts ; sometimes he halted,

To lythe (listen to) the layes · the levely foules made ;

and, leaning against a linden, allowed his fancy to be lulled by their song.¹ He followed the flight of the clouds across the sky, and the march of the mists on the hillside,² hearing, in the same fashion as a poet of a later date, hearing oftentimes,

The still sad music of humanity.³

The then scarcely finished church of Malvern, half Norman, half Gothic, reared its high roof and tower at the base of the hills. Holy and quiet was the place.

Great changes have occurred. The beautiful refectory of the convent, then newly built, adorned with fine wood tracery and carvings, has been pulled down in our century, for no reason but to make room for

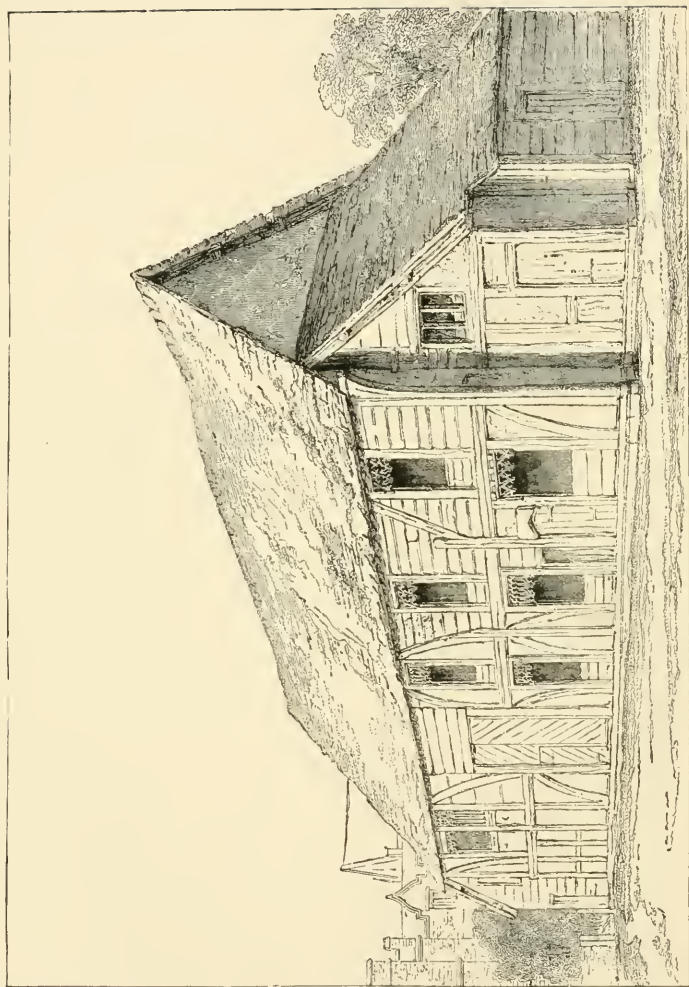
¹ And thus I went wide-where · walkyng myne one (alone),
By a wilde wilderness · and bi a wode-syde.
Blisse of tho briddes · abyde me made,
And under a lynde uppon a launde · lened I a stounde,
To lythe the layes · the levely foules made.

(B. viii. 62.)

² Thow myght bet mete the myst · on Malverne hulles
Than gete a mom of hure mouth · til moneye be hem shewid.

(C. i. 163.)

³ Wordsworth, "On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye," 1798.



THE REFECTORY AT GREAT MALVERN.
Drawn by E. Blore, 1837 (now destroyed).

something else.¹ The case was different with the church; so far back as the XVth century, it was found to threaten ruin, and, owing perhaps to the fall of the great tower, a then rather common accident, the monks had partly to rebuild it in 1450-60; most of the tracery now to be seen belongs to this period; new stained glass was supplied to replace the old broken windows,² of which, however, a few fragments have been preserved. In our century, Gilbert Scott restored the church again with a strong hand.

Parts of the old pile, however, remain; the large Norman pillars of the nave, against which Langland must often have leant, stand intact to this day; a warrior in chain mail armour sleeps in the choir; Prior Walcher of Lorraine was dug up, in the last century, from a neighbouring garden, and his tomb has now been placed under an arch in the church; curiously sculptured stalls, twenty-four in number, have been preserved. These stalls were not in existence when Langland lived at Malvern, and were carved only in the following century, but most of the subjects represented fit some passage in his Visions. The fact is most probably unintentional, but none the less curious as showing the prevalence of the same spirit in poet and sculptor. There we may notice an incident of the perennial war between cats and mice, the question for the "ratons" being, however, not to bell the cat, but to hang him; ³

¹ See Ed. Blore, "Description of the Refectory of the Priory of Great Malvern," in *Archæologia*, 1844.

² On the stained glass at Malvern (Great and Little), see notices by Albert Way and by E. Oldfield in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. ii. p. 48, and vol. xxii. p. 302.

³ See above, p. 43.

a portrait of Sir Gloton, a representation of untensured labourers reaping, mowing, working at shoes, of a physician tending a patient,¹ &c.

Malvern has long ceased to be a place for people enamoured of solitude ; it has become one of the most famous of health resorts ; all that was sombre has been whitewashed, church and cottages ; everything there is clean and neat, restored and well kept ; the very houses are the picture of health ; the churchyard even has assumed an "air de circonstance ;" it has an appearance of peaceful contentment, a place where the dead must be glad to be. Everything there looks inviting. If the dark figure of Piers Plowman were to appear again, it would be whitewashed by the careful inhabitants.

A different Malvern our poet knew, a secluded place, with a school, and "bokes to rede and to lerne." There he studied ; but, from childhood, imagination predominated in him. It had not yet obtained such a hold as to lead him to the verge of hallucination, but its ascendancy was already visible. The young man's intellectual curiosity and facility are very great ; his studies cover a vast ground, but do not go deep ; imagination always leads him away, he is incapable of continued application or research. He is, by nature, a vagabond, both physically and mentally ; he roams over the domain of science, as he wandered over his

¹ These subjects have been often misinterpreted ; the man sitting at his meal with bowl, loaf, knife, &c., has been said to represent the consecration of the sacramental elements ; the bottles which the physician handles, "wateres to loke," as Langland says, have been described as money bags.



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE REFECTORY AT GREAT MALVERN.
Drawn by E. BLORE, 1837.

beloved hills, at random, in every direction, listening here to the song of the birds, and gazing there at the motion of the fleecy vapours :

Thus yrobed in russet · I roamed aboute
Al a somer sesoun . . .
And thus I went wide-where · walkyng myne one . . .
In manere of a mendynaunt. . . .¹

Certain sciences, of which he had a tincture, were taught solely at the universities, and he could only have acquired a knowledge of them at Oxford or Cambridge ; he may therefore have left the priory school to stay in one of these places. The intercourse between Malvern and the universities was very frequent, and numerous documents of the XIVth century have been preserved, showing that licenses were freely granted to studious clerks, willing to leave Malvern for a time, and to follow the lectures in some more learned town.²

Langland received more or less complete notions of theology, logic, grammar, prosody, law, natural history,

¹ B. viii. 1 and 62, B. xiii. 3.

² "Richard de Bristol, clerk, 1304, had license for two years' non-residence for the sake of studye, and respite meanwhile from taking orders. In 1325, Thomas de Leys, priest, had 'a year's dispensation of leave.' Robert le Hont, in 1326, had three years' dispensation given him for the 'sake of studye,' being an acolyte, and three years more, in 1330. Master John Huband, Aug. 1, 1345, had a year's license of 'non-residence,' and John Slourtre, rector of Quatt (*i.e.* Malvern), had a year's license 'for studye,' dated Feb. 7, 1357." James Nott, "Some of the Antiquities of 'Moche Malverne,'" 1885, 8vo, p. 33.

astronomy, "an harde thyng,"¹ &c. We perceive, here and there in his work, that he has retained something of all these sciences. If he comes across disputing friars, he refutes their arguments with school formulas and syllogisms: "*Contra*, quod I, as a clerke."² If a charter is exhibited in his presence, he well knows what qualities will make it receivable, and what flaws cause it to be rejected in a court of justice:

A chartre is chalengeable · byfor a chief justice ;
 If false Latyne be in the lettre · the lawe it inpugeth,
 Or peynted parenterlinarie · or parceles over-skipped ;
 The gome (creature) that gloseth so chartres · for a goky
 (idiot) is holden.
 So is it a goky, by God · that in his gospel failleth,
 Or in masse or in matynes · maketh any defeaute.³

He has learnt the properties of animals, stones, and

¹ All the sciences that "Dame Study" taught then are enumerated with care. "Logyke," she says,

Logyke I lerned hir · and many other lawes,
 And alle the musouns in musike · I made hir to knowe . . .
 Grammer for gerles (children) · I garte first wryte . . .
 Ac Theologie hath tened me · ten score tymes . . .
 Ac astronomye is an harde thyng · and yvel for to knowe,
 Geometric and geomesye · is ginful of speche.

(B. x. 171, 175, 180, 207.)

² Friars pretend that Dowel lives with them:

"*Contra*," quod I, "as a clerke · and comsed to disputen,
 And seide hem sothli, *species in die cadit justus* . . .
 And who-so synneth," I seyde · "doth yvel as me thinketh,
 And Dowel and Do-yvel · mow nought dwelle togideres.
Ergo, he nys naught alway · amonge yow freres."

(B. viii. 20.)

³ B. xi. 296.

plants, a little from nature, and a little from books ; now he talks as Euphues will do later, and his natural mythology causes us to smile, and now he speaks as one country-bred, who has seen with his own eyes, like Burns, a bird build her nest, and has patiently watched her do it :

I hadde wonder at whom · and where the pye lerned
To legge (lay) the stykkes · in which she leyeth and bredeth ;
There nys wrighte as I wene (think) · shulde worche hir nest
to paye.¹

Sometimes the animal is a living one, that leaps from bough to bough in the sunlight ; at others, it is a strange beast fit only to dwell among the stone foliage of a cathedral cornice.

He knows French and Latin ; he has some tincture of the classics ; he would like to know everything :

Alle the sciences under sonne · and alle the soyle craftes
I wolde I knewe and couth · kyndely in myne herte !²

His indignation is roused by so-called clerks, who are nothing but asses, unable to write a verse, to draw a letter, whose grammar is as faulty as their prosody, who know just a little Latin and English, and nothing more, that is, no French at all ; and not even so much Latin as is needed for translating a classic :

Gramer, the grounde of al · bigyleth now children ;
For is none of this newe clerkes · who so nymeth hede,
That can versifye faire · ne formalich enditen ;
Ne nought on amonge a hundreth · that an auctour can construe,
Ne rede a lettre in any langage · but in Latyn or in Englissh.³

¹ B. xi. 338. "To paye," *i.e.*, to satisfaction.

² B. xv. 48.

³ B. xv. 365.

He, on the contrary, is desirous of knowing too much; he does not read, he merely turns over the leaves; he does not study, he jumps at conclusions, and he soon confuses and forgets; his knowledge lacks consistency, like the Malvern mists; the clouds permeate each other and become undistinguishable. Thou art, says appropriately Clergye, one of those who want to know but hate to study:

The were lef to lerne · but loth for to stodie.¹

Langland's youth was spent between these two masters; he followed both "Wit" and "Study," but Wit in preference; a hundred times, he vowed fidelity to Study,² and praised her in touching terms:

For if hevene be on this erthe · and ese to any soule,
It is in cloistre or in scole · be many skilles I fynde;
For in cloistre cometh no man · to chide ne to fighte,
But alle is buxumnesse there and bokes · to rede and to lerne.³

All in vain, the power of fancy could not be resisted; he was, as he says himself, "frantyk of wittes"; already he lost himself in reveries, or else he read romances of chivalry, the history of Guy of Warwick

¹ A. xii. 6. Study is indignant to see how much the poet has learnt without her help, and thanks only to Wit. It is a pity Wit gives encouragement to such "folis":

She was wonderly wroth · that Witte me thus taughte,
And al starynge, dame Studye · sternelich seyde,
"Wel artow wyse," quoth she to Witte · "any wysdomes to
telle

To flatereres or to folis · that frantyk ben of wittes."

(B. x. 3.)

² B. x. 142, &c.

³ B. x. 300.

and the fair Felice ; ¹ he followed Ymagynatyf, who is never idle ; ² later, he will compose verses instead of reciting the Psalms, as if there were not in the world " bokes ynowe." ³

His dreams, at this time, were not all dark ones ; like his compatriot of the same century, Rolle, hermit of Hampole, he had his dreams of youth, and of a brilliant existence, and of love. Rolle used to remember, in his retreat, after his conversion, the time of his youth ; apparitions came to him with smiles ; a beautiful young woman, whom he had known in the world, seemed to stand beside him in his cell, " a full faire yonge womane," says the good hermit, " the whilke I had sene be-fore, and the whilke luffed me noght lytil in gude lufe." ⁴ Sweet-looking apparitions came to Langland also, with radiant smiles and tempting words, saying : Thou art yonge and lusty, and hast years many before thee to live and to love ; look in this mirror, and see the wonders and joys of love.—I shall follow thee, said another, till thou becomest a lord and hast domains. ⁵—And why not ? He had

¹ He remembers her misfortunes and beauty :

Felyce hir fayrnesse · fel hir al to sklaundre. (B. xii. 47.)

² "I am Ymagynatyf," quod he · " idel was I nevere." (B. xii. 1.)

³ B. xii. 17.

⁴ "English Prose Treatises," ed. Perry, 1866, p. 5.

⁵ *Concupiscentia-Carnis* · colled me aboute the nekke,
And seyde, " thow art yonge and yepe · and hast yeres ynowe,
Forto lyve longe · and ladyes to loveye.
And in this myroure thow myghte se · myrthes ful manye,
That leden the wil to lykyng · al thi lyf-tyme."

The secounde seide the same · " I shal suwe thi wille ;
Til thow be a lorde and haue londe. . . ." (B. xi. 16.)

indeed life before him ; he had started from the lowest point, and had rapidly risen ; the hardest part was over ; his heaviest chains had fallen off ; his quick wit had obtained patrons for him ; he would rise in the world, he would be loved, and he would be powerful.

III.

This dream was to remain a dream. Great expectations he might indulge in, so long as the friends, who had been the protectors of his boyhood, lived ; by himself, or with the sole aid of his father, he could do nothing. Should his friends disappear, before his fortunes were firmly established, it meant certain ruin, the impossibility of rising in life, and all the miseries attendant on a false situation, an "advancement by clergy," of which the origin was too recent to be forgotten.

This is precisely what happened. The friends of the poet died. They disappeared, perhaps during one of those terrible epidemics that swept away whole families and depopulated entire villages. If they perished in the great pestilence of 1349, which raged cruelly in the west,¹ the poet would then have reached

¹ "Tunc pestis dolorosa penetravit maritima per Southamptonam et venit Bristollam, et moriebantur quasi tota valitudo villæ quasi subita morte præoccupati, nam pauci erant qui lectum occupabant ultra iij dies, vel duos dies, aut dimidium diem. . . . Et moriebantur apud Leycestriam in parva parochia Sancti Leonardi plusquam cccclxxx. In parochia Sanctæ Crucis plusquam cccc . . . et sic in singulis parochiis in magna multitudine." Knyghton, an eye-witness ; in Twysden, "Decem Scriptores," col. 2599.

the age of eighteen. Being young, strong, and full of hope, he must have kept his illusions some time longer. But, little by little, the lights faded and the clouds grew darker. Isolation, poverty, and desire, all evil counsellors, now influence him. He has no one to help him ; he has only his "clergye," which is extensive if superficial, and we find him in London, trying to live by means of it, of "that labour that ich lerned best."¹

Religious life, in the Middle Ages, did not have those well defined and visible landmarks which we are accustomed to. Nowadays, one either is or is not, of the Church ; formerly, no such obvious divisions existed. Religious life spread through society, like an immense river without dykes, swollen by innumerable affluents, whose subterranean penetrations impregnated even the soil through which they did not actually flow. From this arose numerous situations difficult to define, bordering at once on the world and the Church, a state of things with which there is no analogy now, except in Rome itself, where the religious life of the Middle Ages still partly continues.

In Rome, many clerks receive minor orders and do not go beyond. They perform ecclesiastical functions, such as those of sacristans, or chanters ; they are married, but nevertheless wear a tonsure and a clerical dress. What is now customary only in Rome, used, in the Middle Ages, to be so in Paris, London, and everywhere.

¹ Yf ich by labour sholde lyve * and lyflode deserven,
That labour that ich lerned best * ther-with lyve ich sholde ;
In eadem vocatione in qua vocati estis manete.

(C. vi. 42.)

The vocabulary used with reference to these situations had a vagueness in accordance with the undefined character of the situations themselves; neither had sharply cut limits. A "clerk" meant a man able to read, and this man, or clerk, could claim certain ecclesiastical privileges; a chaplain was not necessarily a priest hearing confession and saying mass; he was sometimes simply the custodian of a chapel, or a keeper of relics.

Numerous semi-religious, and slightly remunerative functions, were accessible to clerks, who were not, however, obliged to renounce the world on that account. The great thing in the hour of death being to ensure the salvation of the soul, every man of fortune continued, and sometimes began, his good works at that hour. He endeavoured to win Paradise by proxy. He left directions, in his will, that, by means of lawful hire, a few soldiers should be sent to battle with the infidel; and he also founded what were called "chantries."¹ A sum of money was left by him, in order that masses, or the service for the dead, or both, should be chanted, either for a certain number of years, or for ever, for the repose of his soul.

The number of these chantries was countless; every arch in the side aisles of cathedrals contained

¹ "*Cantaria, cantuaria*, beneficium ecclesiasticum, missis decantandis addictum, et cui desserviunt qui alias capellani dicuntur. *Cantaria*, cantoris dignitas, officium ecclesiasticum, Gall. *chantrerie*" (Du Cange).

"A la charge . . . de faire par chascun an, après nostre décès, à tel jour qu'il aura esté, une chantrerie de trois grans messes."—A.D. 1471. Godefroy, "Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue Française," word *Chantrerie*.

some, where the service for the dead was sung ; sometimes separate edifices were built with this view. A priest celebrated divine service when the founder had asked for masses ; and clerks performed the office of choristers, being, for the most part, individuals only received into the first ecclesiastical degrees, and not necessarily in holy orders. It was, for them all, a career, almost a trade ; giving rise to discussions concerning salaries, and even to actual strikes.¹ The two sorts of people attendant upon these foundations are sometimes separately mentioned and named in the deeds of creation : *capellani* and *choristi*. Sometimes also, a school or hospital was attached to the chantry, or helped out of the same funds : “ Cantaria de Castell Donyngton . . . founded . . . to thentent to ffynde one preste, as well to syng dyvyne servyce in a chapel of our Ladye within the paroche church there, and to praye for the ffounders soule, as for to teche a gramar scole there for the erudycyon of pore scolers within a scole house ffounde by the seyde Harolde within the seyde towne of Donyngton.” Another is established

¹ The Commons sometimes complain in Parliament that chaplains and choristers are very remiss in fulfilling their obligations : e.g. year 1347, 21 Ed. III., “ Rotuli Parliamentorum,” vol. ii. p. 184. On another occasion, they complain that the same, as well as all the labourers whatsoever, refuse to work at the old rate, “ depuis la grande pestilence ore tart,” year 1362, *ibid.*, p. 271. They draw a distinction between the “ chapeleins parochiels,” who can pretend to six marks and no more, and the chantry chaplains, that is, chaplains “ chantantz annales et à cure de almes nient entendantz.” They mention also the “ chapeleins annals,” whom “ homme seculer ” may have “ retenuz à demurer à sa table ” ; the very object, at a time, of our poet’s ambition.

“to praye ffor the ffounders solles, and to kepe hospytaallyte there.”¹

The religious services performed in the chantries derived the name under which they commonly went, from one of the words of the liturgy sung; they were called *Placebos* and *Diriges*.² The word “dirge” has passed into the English language, and is derived from the latter. The service for the dead, properly so called, did not include mass; it was a “vigil,”³ and could

¹ Walcott, “Chantries of Leicestershire,” in the “Transactions of the Leicestershire Architectural . . . Society.” To another foundation are attached “xiii vikers chorall, iiii clarks, vi querysters.” Ibid.

² “Et quod dicti nunc capellani et successores sui cantariæ prædictæ in dicta capella insimul dicant septimanatim singulis annis imperpetuum *Placebo* et *Dirige*, cum novem leccionibus et suis antiphonis versiculis et responsoriis, omni feria quinta.” XVth century, Roch, “Church of our Fathers,” London, 1849, 3 vols. 8vo. vol. i. p. 125. In the same way Langland states that his tools are :

. . . *Pater-noster* and my prymer • *placebo* and *dirige*,
And my sauter som tyme • and my sevene psalmes.
Thus ich synge for hure soules • of such as me helpen.

C. vi. 46. “Placebo” begins an antiphone in the service for the dead (vespers): “Placebo Domino in regione vivorum.” “Dirige” is the first word of an antiphone in the same service (matins): “Dirige, Dominus meus, in conspectu tuo, viam meam.” “Officium Defunctorum,” Paris, Lecoffre, pp. 20, 32.

³ “C’était une vigile, qui comportait, comme toute vigile, des vêpres, trois nocturnes et les laudes . . . Les vêpres avaient leurs cinq psaumes antiphonés, un verset et le *Magnificat* antiphoné, suivi du *Kyrie eleison* et de l’oraison dominicale. . . . Les trois nocturnes commençaient sans invitoire, . . . chaque nocturne comptait trois psaumes antiphonés, trois leçons tirées du livre de Job (neuf leçons en tout), chacune suivie d’un repons tiré aussi



INTERIOR VIEW OF OLD ST. PAUL'S.
 From DUGDALE'S "St. Paul's."

therefore be celebrated by clerks who were not priests.

Chantries were especially numerous and richly endowed in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, the famous gothic church, with its innumerable arcades, altars, shrines, and recesses, its Saxon tomb of King Sebba, its shrine of St. Erkenwald, a far-famed church, endowed by princes and merchants with ample revenues, and by bishops with a wealth of pardons, no less useful in those days. The ample structure and its appendages were surrounded by a defensive wall, and formed a sort of city within the City, a city of prayers and chant, from which thieves "and other lewd people" were with great difficulty expelled. "Upon information made to King Edward I. that, by the lurking of thieves and other lewd people, in the night-time, within the precinct of this churchyard, divers robberies, homicides, and fornications had been oft times committed therein ; for the preventing therefore of the like for the future, the said king, by his patent, bearing date at Westminster, X Junii, in the thirteenth year of his reign . . . granted unto the . . . dean and canons, license to include the said churchyard with a wall on every side, with fitting gates and posterns therein, to be opened every morning and closed at night."¹

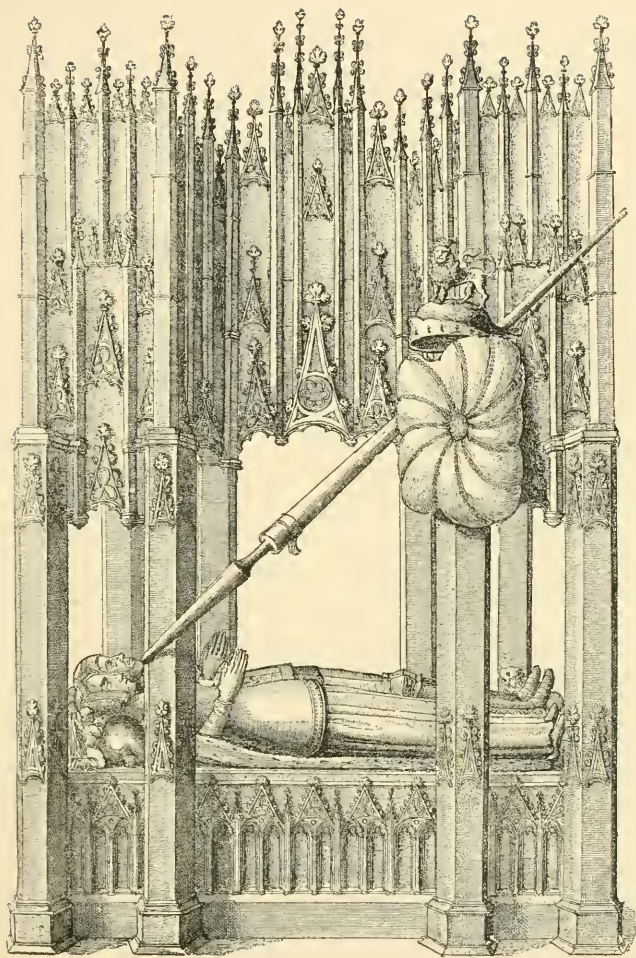
du livre de Job. . . . Les nocturnes avaient leurs laudes : cinq psaumes antiphonés, un verset, le *Benedictus* antiphoné, le *Kyrie eleison* et l'oraison dominicale. . . . La vigile des morts en vint à être célébrée quotidiennement tant dans les monastères que dans les chapitres et églises paroissiales." Batiffol, "Histoire du Bréviaire Romain," Paris, 1893, pp. 189, 190.

¹ Dugdale, "The History of St. Paul's Cathedral in London," London, 1658, fol., p. 17.

Some important chantries and many lesser ones had been established within the church, the earliest one dating so far back as the reign of Henry II.¹ One had been instituted, in the XIIIth century, by Alice, wife of "William Mareschall, son to William earl of Pembroke," for the "health of her soul, and his, the said William, his ancestours and successors soul," part of the revenue "to be spent upon a lampe continually burning over her tombe." Another was founded by the executors of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, "in a certain chapell situate on the north side of the quire of this church, and opposite the tombe of the said Duke and the Lady Blanch his wife," Chaucer's "Duchesse." The tomb was destroyed in the great fire of 1666, but we have a fine engraving of it by Hollar. The chantry was richly endowed by Henry IV., the son of John and Blanche. The anniversary of the deceased was to be commemorated "with *Placebo* and *Dirige*, ix antiphones, ix psalms, ix lessons in the exequies of either of them, as also mass of Requiem . . . to be performed at the high altar for ever." The lord mayor was to be present, and to receive three shillings and fourpence for his trouble; some money was also allowed to the dean, canons, vicars, choristers, bell-ringers, lamp-keepers, &c. Lodgings were, in this case, provided for the chantry priests: "To the Bishop of London, for the rent of the house, wherein the said chantrie priests did reside, xs."

Much care and money were spent in adorning the chantry chapels; some of those in St. Paul's glittered

¹ Dugdale, "The History of St. Paul's Cathedral in London," pp. 24 *et seq.*



TOMB OF JOHN OF GAUNT AND "BLAUNCHE THE DUCHESSE ' IN OLD ST. PAUL S.
From DUGDALE'S "St. Paul's."

with azure and gold, and were enriched with statues, tabernacles, and scenes from the Scriptures. Roger de Waltham, for example (19 Ed. II.), "founded a certain oratory on the south side of the quire in this cathedrall . . . and adorned it with the images of our blessed Saviour, St. John the Baptist, St. Laurence, and St. Mary Magdalen ; so likewise with the pictures of the celestiall hierarchie, the joys of the blessed Virgin and others . . . in which oratory the chantry before mentioned was placed ; . . . and lastly, in the south wall opposite to the said oratory, erected a glorious Tabernacle, which contained the image of the said blessed virgin, sitting as it were in child-bed, as also of our Saviour in swadling clothes, lying between the oxe and the ass ; and St. Joseph at her feet. Above which was another image of her, standing with the child in her arms. And on the beame thwarting from the upper end of the oratory to the before-specified child-bed, placed the crowned image of our Saviour and his mother, sitting in one tabernacle, as also the images of St. Katherine and St. Margaret, virgins and martyrs. Neither was there any part of the said oratory or roof thereof, but he caused it to be beautified with comely pictures and images. . . . In which oratory he designed that his sepulchre should be." ¹ All Waltham's savings were thus appropriated, and the good canon thought with satisfaction that, among those splendid sculptures and paintings, in this church which had been the centre of his life, he would quietly sleep for ever.

Most of the chantries were of less importance ; they would sometimes fall into disuse and be forgotten, like

¹ Dugdale, *ibid.*, p. 29.

a worn-out inscription, defaced by the tread of men, and years. A benefactor would then occasionally appear to revive the foundation. Thus, in the year 1376, Roger Holme, "chancelour of London," did "restore and establish a certain chantrie of one priest for the soul of John de Wengham, some time chief chanter in this cathedral, which chantrie was then utterly come to nothing."

A world of church officials, priests, and clerks thus won their livelihood in this busy prayer-mill. Some felt so much attachment for the place that, as John de Wengham, they would not leave it even after their death, and, having chanted for others all their life, they would be in their turn chanted for, "in perpetuum." Others felt differently; gold and azure had little effect upon them; to their number belonged the new-comer from Malvern Hills.

To psalmody for money, to chant the same words, from day to day and from year to year, transforming into a mere mechanical toil the divine gift and duty of prayer, could not answer the ideal of life conceived by a proud and generous soul filled with vast thoughts. Langland, however, was obliged to curb his mind to this work; "Placebo" and "Dirige" became his *tools*:

The lomes that ich laboure with and lyfode deserve.¹

- He strongly condemned the abuse, and yet profited by it, not without pangs, it is true, and without feelings of indignation against himself; but he soon found he had no other means of living, and was unable of escaping from this false situation and subordinate employment.

¹ C. vi. 45.

He denounces with anger, but at the same time imitates those parsons and parish priests who go to their bishop and say : Our parishioners have been ruined by the plague ; we can draw nothing from them, and can no longer stay among them. Let us go to London and sing there for hire, "for silver is sweet" :

Persones and parisch prestes · playneth to heore bisschops,
That heore parisch hath ben pore · seththe the pestilence tyme,
And asketh leve and lycence · at Londun to dwelle,
To singe ther for simonye · for selver is swete.¹

His last chance of rising in the world was removed by marriage. The bondman's son might have become a bishop ; such things had been, and Langland himself notes it ; he held it an abuse, but he would, may be, have availed himself of this as of others. Married, however, this door was barred, and great hopes were denied him. At this juncture, the unreal world of visions began to supersede more and more, before his mind's eye, the world of human interests that was closed for him. And thus it was that, having once written down his dreams, he passed, contrary to his own intention,² his entire life altering them ; he lived with them and in them.

We therefore find him in London, disappointed, galled, and humiliated by the existence he leads, his outward pride being proportionate to his inward abasement. He lives in a little house in Cornhill, not far from St. Paul's, the cathedral of the many chantries, and not far from that tower of Aldgate to which about this time another poet, namely Chaucer, directed his

¹ A. Prol. 80.

² See A. xii. 103.

dreamy steps every evening. Langland dwelt there with his wife Kytte, and Kalote his daughter (otherwise Catherine and Nicolette),¹ eking out, may be, the salary earned by chanting, with money gained by drawing up charters and writing letters.²

He has depicted himself at this period of his existence, a great, gaunt figure, dressed in sombre garments with large folds, sad in a grief without end, bewailing the protectors of his childhood and his lost illusions, seeing nothing but clouds on the horizon of this life. He begins no new friendships ; he forms ties with no one ; he follows the crowded streets of the city, elbowing

¹ Thus ich a-waked, God wot · whanne ich wonede on Corne-
hulle,

Kytte and ich in a cote.

(C. vi. 1.)

. . . and right with that I waked,

And called Kitte my wyf · and Kalote my doughter.

(B. xviii. 425.)

² This was usual with chaplains and clerks. The custom was, says Du Cange, “ut capellani procerum eorum essent amanuenses, epistolas et diplomata conscriberent”; and he gives an example from the “Roman de Garin”:

Un chappelein appelle, se li dist :

Fes une lestres.

(Du Cange, *verbo* Capellanus.) There was, at Westminster, a “chirographer” in chief, under whose direction clerks drew legal documents. According to the statute, “le cerograffer prendra pur l’engrosser de chescun fyn levé en la court le Roi, iiij s. tant soulement.” The Commons complain, in 1376, that he, and the clerks under him, take more. “Rotuli Parliamentorum,” vol. ii. p. 357. As for Langland, it will be noticed that he derides clerks who are unable to draw a letter properly, and that, at several places, he complacently gives proof of his own knowledge in the matter of legal documents.

lords, lawyers, and ladies of fashion ; he greets no one. Men wearing furs and silver pendants, rich garments and collars of gold, rub past him, and he knows them not. Gold collars ought to be saluted, but he does not do it ; he does not say to them, "God loke yow, lordes !" But then his air is so absent, so strange, that instead of quarrelling with him, people shrug their shoulders, and say : He is "a fole" ; he is mad. Mad ! the word recurs again and again under his pen, the idea presents itself incessantly to his mind, under every shape, as though he were possessed by it : fole, frantyk, ydiote ! Madness, to be proud when one is so poor ! Folly, not to respect furs when one depends for a livelihood on those who wear them ! For that has happened to him which he dreaded above all, he has relapsed into a state of dependence ; another servitude has begun for him, more cruel than that of his childhood, because he elbows the rich and prosperous. The temptresses of his youth had warned him, and said, showing him the delights of earth : These things we will bestow upon thee, thou shalt possess and hold them all ; thou shalt have them—if Fortune be willing, "if Fortune it lyke" ; and Fortune had not been willing. Thou shalt be loved, and "have londe," promised the fairies at his birth. "Havest thow londes to lyve by ?" ¹ now inquires Reason. He has neither lands nor riches ; he lives "*in* Londone and *on* Londone bothe," ² singing psalms for hire, eating his fill only when invited out, seeking for invitations, and showing, at the same time, his scorn of the life he leads, by the disparaging terms which he employs when describing it.

¹ C. vi. 26.

² C. vi. 44.

It is the life of a beggar, with this difference, that beggars have a wallet and bottle in which to bestow their provisions :

Thus-gate ich begge
With-oute bagge other botel • bote my wombe one.¹

The apparitions had promised love ; and now that years come, he has a wife so good as to wish he were already in heaven. He sees, around him, nothing but dismal spectres : Age, Penury, Disease.²

To these material woes are added mental ones. In the darkness of this world shines at least a distant ray, far off beyond the grave. But, at times, even this light wavers ; clouds obscure and apparently extinguish it. *Doubts assail the soul of the dreamer. Theology ought to elucidate, but, on the contrary, only darkens them :

The more I muse there-inne • the mistier it semeth,
And the depper I devyne • the derker me it thinketh,³

says poor Langland. How is it possible to reconcile

¹ C. vi. 51.

² Elde (old age),

. . . buffeted me aboute the mouthe • and bette out my tethe,
And gyved me in goutes • I may noughte go at large.
And of the wo that I was in • my wyf had reuthe,
And wissched ful witterly • that I were in hevenc.

(B. xx. 190.)

³ Such is the account given of theology by Dame Study herself. "Graunt mercy, madame," answers the poet, "mekeliche," and not without a sneer. B. x. 181 and 218. Langland was fond of making such answers. After an over-long sermon, he observes :

"This is a longe lessoun," quod I • "and litel am I the wyser."
(B. x. 372.)

the teachings of theology with our idea of justice? And certain thoughts constantly recur to the poet, and shake the edifice of his faith; he drives them away, they reappear; he is bewitched by them, and cannot exorcise these demons. Who had a finer mind than Aristotle, and who was wiser than Solomon? Still they are held by Holy-Church "bothe ydampned!"¹ and on Good Friday, what do we see? a felon is saved who had lived all his life in lies and thefts; he was saved at once, "with-outen penaunce of purgatorie." Adam, Isaiah, and all the prophets remained "many longe yeres" with Lucifer, and

A robbere was yraunceouned · rather than thei alle . . .
 Thanne Marye Magdaleyne · what womman dede worse ?
 Or who worse than David · that Uries deth conspired ?
 Or Poule the apostle · that no pitee hadde,
 Moche crystene kynde · to kylle to deth ?
 And now ben thise as sovereynes · with seyntes in hevене,
 Tho that wroughte wikkedlokest · in worlde tho thei were,
 And tho that wisely wordeden and wryten many bokes
 Of witte and of wisdom · with dampned soules wonye !²

No explanation satisfies him. He wishes he had thought less, learnt less, "conned" fewer books, and preserved for himself the quiet, "sad bileve" of "plowmen and pastoures;" happy men who can

Percen with a *pater-noster* · the paleys of hevене.³

In these moments of anguish, he falls an easy prey to material temptations; satisfied lusts chase away melancholy for a time; he follows "Coveityse of the eyghes"

¹ B. x. 386.

² B. x. 420.

³ B. x. 457, 461.

and neglects Dowel and Dobet : "Have no conscience how thow come to gode!"¹ Then austere thoughts regain their influence; he turns anew to his faith and to the Church, with the passion and the tears of mystics in all ages. He yields to the counsels of Reason :

"That ys soth," ich seide · "and so ich by-knowe,
That ich have tynt (lost) tyme · and tyme mysspended."

He atones for his past life, and

... as he · that ofte haveth chaffared
That ay hath lost and lost · and atte laste hym happed
He bouhte suche a bargayn · he was the bet evere,
And sette hus lost at a lef · at the laste ende,

he hurries to church,

God to honourie ;
By-for the crois on my knees · knocked ich my brest,
Sykyng for my synnes · seggyng my *pater-noster*,
Wepyng and wailing.²

In this confession of the poet, are found some of the symptoms of those diseases of the will which have been so minutely studied in our time.³ The bent of his mind, the predominance of Ymagynatyf, his insatiable curiosity, and his vast but frustrated hopes, his false social position, his retired life, his reveries and his contemplations, all tended to the ruin of that frail edifice, human will. We can notice in his case the existence of several among the phenomena which characterise these

¹ B. xi. 52.

² C. vi. 92, 94, 105.

³ Th. Ribot, "Les Maladies de la Volonté," eighth edition, Paris, 1893, 8vo.

diseases, such as fixed ideas, and, with them, alteration or depression of the will (*diboulie, aboulie*). "Volition is a definitive state, and ends the struggle. . . . In changeable natures this definitive state is always a temporary one; that is, the willing self is of such unstable nature that the most insignificant ripple on the surface of conscience will alter it and make it different." This explains in Langland the ebb and flow of contrary desires, his being successively drawn to the world and to God, and his sudden conversions.

Hence arises also his incapacity to act; he resembles those sick people who "may feel a desire to act, but are incapable of acting in a proper manner. They would like to work, and are unable to do so." "Thought" always accompanies him: and "in the same proportion as thought covers a larger field, capacity for motion dwindles away." Thus it is we find him incapable of reacting against the conditions of his life; he submitted to, yet was ashamed of them; he cursed them, without finding strength and energy to break hated ties. He blames abuses, and yet takes advantage of them, because his will is diseased. He enters into interminable discussions with himself; he severs his person in two, and discusses with his other self; in his visions, he constantly comes to dialogue, but in these dialogues it is always, under various names, Langland's *two selves* that quarrel. In him is again verified "how painfully uncertain is the singleness of the self. When there is a struggle, which is the true self, the one that acts or the one that resists? If they come to a standstill, then both remain separate and discernible; if one of them yields, the other does not

represent more satisfactorily the whole person, than a hard-won majority represents the whole State.”¹

- But, if his will is weak, his judgment is sound ; and no one, as will be seen, has preached with more energy, on many important questions, during the Middle Ages,
- the simple laws of common sense. This combination of sense and folly, this madness with “ method ” in it, is curious and strange ; but not, however, unexampled among mystics and dreamers.

What was the end of this troubled soul ? We do not know. A fragment of a poem on the last years of Richard² appears to have been written by him. Some indications lead us to think that in his later years he left London, where he had led his painful life, to return to his Western hills. There we should like to think of him, soothed, resigned, healed, contemplating with a less anxious eye that “ feir feld ful of folk ” where he had beheld the struggles of humanity, and watching decline in the west that sun he had seen rise, many years before, “ in a somere seyson.”

¹ Th. Ribot, “ *Les Maladies de la Volonté*,” *ibid.*, pp. 36, 38, 138, 88.

² Published by Mr. Skeat with the “ *Visions* ” under the title of “ *Richard the Redeless*.” Mr. Skeat has given very good reasons to show that this fragment must be attributed to Langland (Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. lxxxiv.).

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORLD.

I.

BECAUSE Langland reveres virtue, many commentators have made a saint of him ; because he condemns, as an abuse, the admission of peasants' sons to holy orders, they have it that he was born of good family ; and because he speaks in a bitter and passionate way of the wrongs of his time, they have made him out a radical reformer, aiming at profound changes in the religious and social order of things. He was nothing of all this. The energy of his language, the eloquence and force of his words may have given rise to this delusion. In reality, he is, from the religious and social points of view, one of those rare thinkers who defend moderate ideas with vehemence, and employ all the resources of a fiery spirit in the defence of common sense.

The ideas of the greatest number, and average English opinion, find in the *Visions* an echo or a commentary that they had nowhere else at that time. Chaucer, with his genius and his many qualities, his gaiety and his gracefulness, his faculty of observation and that appre-

hensiveness of mind which enables him to sympathise with the most diverse specimens of humanity, has drawn an immortal and incomparable picture of mediæval England. In certain respects, however, the description is incomplete, and one must borrow from Langland the finishing touches.

We owe to Chaucer's horror of vain abstractions the picturesque individuality of each one of his personages ; all classes of society are represented in his works ; but the types which impersonate them are so clearly characterised, their singleness is so marked, that, on seeing them, we think of them alone and of no one else ; individuals occupy all the foreground, and the background of the canvas disappears ; we are so absorbed in the contemplation of this or that man, that we think no more of the class, the ensemble, the nation.

The active and actual passions of the multitude, the subterranean lavas which simmer beneath a brittle crust of good order and regular administration, all the latent possibilities of volcanoes which this inward fire represents, are, on the contrary, always present to the mind of our visionary. Rumbings are heard and herald the earthquake. The vehement and passionate England that produced the great revolt of 1381 and the heresy of Wyclif, that later on will give birth to Cavaliers and Puritans, is contained in essence in Langland's work ; we divine, we foresee her. Chaucer's book is, undoubtedly, not in contradiction to that England, but it screens and allows her to be forgotten.

Multitudes, like men, have their individuality. It seems as if Chaucer had, in depicting his characters, expended all his gift of individualising. His horror of

abstractions does not extend to multitudes; his multitudes are abstract ones. Excepting two or three profound observations, such as a man of his genius could not fail to make, he shows us the mass of humanity changeable, uncertain, "unsad, untrue:"¹ remarks applicable to the crowds of all times and recorded in the works of all authors.

From that point of view, Langland is very different from his illustrious contemporary. He excels in the difficult art of conveying the impression of a multitude, not of an indistinct or abstract multitude, motionless, painted on the back scene of his stage and fit to serve for any play; his crowds of human beings have a character and temper of their own; he does not stop long to describe them; still, we see them; when they are absent from the stage, we hear them in the distance; we feel their approach. They are not any crowd, they are an English crowd; in spite of the wear and tear of time, we still discern their features, as we do those of the statues on old tombs. Their enthusiasm, their anger, their bursts of joy, are in unison with those of to-day; we can intermingle old and new feelings, and there will be differences of degrees, but no discord. It needs little imagination to trace in the Visions sketches recalling the gravity of a modern crowd listening in the open air to a popular orator, or the merriment of a return from Epsom. In their anger Chaucer's people exchange

¹ O stormy people, unsad and ever untrewē,
And undiscret, and chaunging as a fane,
Delytyng ever in rombel that is newe,
For lik the moone ay waxe ye and wane. . . .
(*"The Clerkes Tale,"* vi. 57.)

blows on the highway ; Langland's crowds, in their anger, sack the palace of the Savoy and take the Tower of London.

Langland thus shows us what we find in none of his contemporaries : crowds, groups, classes, living and individualized ; the merchant class, the religious world, the Commons of England. He is, above all, the only author who gives a sufficient and contemporaneous idea of that grand phenomenon, the power of Parliament. Chaucer, who was himself a member of that assembly, sends his franklin there ; he mentions the fact, and nothing more :

Ful ofte tyme he was knight of the schire.

The part played by the franklin in that group, amid that concourse of human beings, is not described. On the other hand, an admirable picture represents him keeping open house, and ordering capons, partridges, and "poynant sauce" in abundance. At home, his personality stands out in relief ; Chaucer is delighted with the idea of the man, and so are we :

Withoute bake mete was never his hous.
Of fleissch and fisch, and that so plentyvous,
It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke. . . .
Ful many a fat partrich had he in mewe,
And many a brem and many a luce in stewe.
Woo was his cook, but if his sauce were
Poynant and scharp.

But yonder, at Westminster, the franklin was doubtless lost in the crowd ; and crowds had little interest for Chaucer.

The chroniclers, on the other hand, give us glimpses

of this marvellous power, but they do not seem amazed by it ; they do not stop to describe it ; in most of them we only discern the strength of the Commons by observing the consequences of their debates. Froissart, it is true, notes the fact that the kings of England have to reckon with their subjects : " The king of England must obey his people and do all they please." ¹ He observes the power of the " Parliaments that sit at Westminster on Michaelmas " ; but the grandeur of the movement which brought about this political organisation escapes him entirely. To him, it is merely a curiosity, which he mentions as he would have mentioned Stonehenge.

In two documents only does that power appear great and impressive as it really was, and those documents are : the Rolls wherein are recorded the acts of Parliament, and the poem of William Langland.

No one before him, none of his contemporaries, had seen so clearly how the matter stood. The whole organisation of the English State is summed up in a line of admirable conciseness and energy, in which the poet shows the king surrounded by his people :

. . . Knyghthod hyin ladde,
Might of the comunes · made hym to regne.²

The power of the Commons is always present to the mind of Langland. He constantly borrows similes from the machinery of Parliament. He shows us how

¹ " Il fault que li rois d'Engleterre obeise a son peuple et face tout ce qu'il voellent." "Chroniques," ed. Luce, vol. i. pp. 337, 307.

² B. Prol. 112.

petitions were submitted to the king in that assembly; ¹ he observes the impossibility of doing without the Commons, the necessity of their control to maintain the balance of the State; the whole organisation is familiar to him, but nevertheless he sees it as grand and imposing as it actually was.

The part played by the Commons is clearly defined. By them the king reigns; they see that the labourers of the fields and the artisans of the towns feed and clothe the sovereign, the knights and the clergy, honestly and at reasonable prices.²] We know how many statutes on that subject, under Edward III. and Richard II., were due to their somewhat indiscriminate zeal. They make the laws with the assistance of the king, and of Native Good Sense, "Kynde Wytte." When the king is inclined to stretch his prerogative beyond measure, when he gives in his speeches a foretaste of the theory of divine right, when he speaks as did Richard II. a few years after, and the Stuarts three centuries later, when he boasts of being the ruler of all, of being "hed of

¹ And thanne come Pees in-to parlement · and put forth a bille,
How Wronge (&c.)

(B. iv. 47.)

² B. Prol. 114. The king's council is also mentioned at the same place :

And thanne cam kynde wytte · and clerkes he made,
For to consaille the kyng · and the comune save.
The kyng and knyghthode · and clergie both
Casten that the comune · shulde hem-self fynde (provide for).
The comune contrevēd · of kynde witte craftes,
And for profit of alle the poeple · plowmen ordeygned,
To tilie and travaile · as trewe lyf asketh.
The kyng and the comune · and kynde witte the thridde
Shope law and lewte · eche man to knowe his owne.

lawe," while the Clergy and Commons are but members of the same :

“ I am kyng with croune · the comune to reule,
And holykirke and clergie · fro cursede men to defende.

. . . I am hed of lawe ;

For ye ben but membres • and I above alle " 1—

Langland stops him, and through the mouth of Conscience, adds a menacing clause :

“In condicioun,” quod Conscience • “that thow konne defende
And rule thi rewme in resoun • right wel, and in treuth.” ²

The deposition of Richard, accused of having stated, nearly in the same terms, "that he dictated from his lips the laws of his kingdom,"³ and the fall of the Stuarts, are contained, so to say, in these almost prophetic words. If views of this kind abound in Langland, it is because his temperament is that of the nation, which temperament has scarcely altered from the XIVth century to our own times ; it acts in the same fashion, from century to century, in similar circumstances.

Langland is a man of sense, he does not expect impossibilities ; he is a passionate adherent of Parliament, but a reasonable one ; he threatens and prophesies, but all his efforts tend to avert catastrophes. He speaks harshly to the king, but no less harshly to his beloved Commons. Let us remember the fable of the rats : the king is indispensable to the balance of the

¹ B. xix. 463.

² B. xix. 474.

³ "Dixit expresse . . . quod leges sue erant in pectore suo," &c. "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. iii. p. 419.

State ; if he disappeared, it would mean anarchy, and the end of the English social edifice ; the poet protests against the encroachments of the Commons and against the idea that Parliament could do without a ruler :

Had ye . . . yowre wille · ye couthe noughte reule yowre-
selve.¹

Even at that remote period the mainsprings of the social powers are adjusted with such precision that, three hundred years later, the ambassadors of Louis XIV. find them exactly the same, and observe that on their maintenance depend all the strength and stability of the State. The Comte de Cominges, who did not know a word of English and cannot be accused of borrowing his remarks from Langland, writes in a despatch : "The arrangement of the laws of this kingdom is such, and has established such a balance of power between the king and his subjects, that they appear to be joined together by indissoluble ties ; so much so that, failing one of the parties, the other would go to ruin."²

Saving the quite exceptional and rare case of overweening ambition displayed during the Good Parliament, we may say that, on all questions, Langland is entirely with the Commons, when, at least, they are not the packed Commons of a "prive parliament."³ We

¹ B. Prol. 200.

² "La disposition des lois de ce royaume a mis un tel tempérament entre le Roi et ses sujets, qu'il semble qu'ils soient joints par des liens indissolubles, et que la séparation de l'une des parties entraîne la ruine de l'autre." "A French Ambassador at the Court of Charles II.," London, 1892, 8vo, p. 224.

³ Described in "Richard Redeless." See Appendix, XII.

know that, in the XIVth century, they did not represent the lowest class of society, but a class comparatively well off, whose views were not always very liberal. On these matters, as on others, Langland, though of an obscure origin, is always of their opinion. He is in favour of the old division of classes,¹ and of that regulation of wages by the State, which was so often re-established, confirmed, and strengthened with penalties, by the king at the request of the Commons. In spite of statutes and tariffs the labourers claim high pay; the rightful rate is low; nevertheless they demand wages which are "outrageous," says the statute;² "heighlich," says Langland; they break out in imprecations against the king and his council, who apply such laws to the detriment of the labouring class. The poet also notes fresh demands in the way of food; craftsmen are no longer content

¹ A "cherle"

. . . may renne in arrerage · and rowme so fro home,
And as a reneyed caityf · recchelesly gon aboute ;

Ac Resoun shal rekne with hym · and casten him in arrerage.

B. xi. 124. This passage (not in A) recalls one of the petitions of the Good Parliament of 1376, against the "laborers, artificers et altres servantz," who "par grande malice . . . fuont et descurrent sodeynement hors de lours services, et hors de lours pays propre, de countée en countée." Reason shall reckon with them, says Langland. The interpretation put by the Commons on this counsel of Reason is, that the labourers should be "prys et mys in cepes" (stocks). "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. p. 340.

² E.g., Statute 23 Ed. III.; 25 Ed. III. st. 1; 36 Ed. III. ch. 8; 42 Ed. III. ch. 6, &c. These statutes describe a practice invented by and due to the "malice des servants" which consists in refusing all work if salaries are not raised; they describe, in fact, actual strikes.

with bacon and penny-ale ; they must have meat and fish ; they demand daintily prepared viands, they clamour for them “*chaude or plus chaud*” :

Laborerres that have no lande · to lyve on but her handes
 Deyned nought to dyne a-day · nyght olde wortes (vegetables).
 May no peny-ale hem paye · ne no pece of bakoun,
 But it be fresch flesch other fische · fryed other bake,
 And that *chaude* or *plus chaud* · for chillyng of her mawe.¹
 And but-if he be heighlich huyred · ellis wil he chyde . . .
 And thanne curseth he the kynge · and al his conseil after,
 Suche lawes to loke · laboreres to greve.²

Langland, like the Commons, labours under the delusion that, in matters social and economical, one can accomplish everything by laws and regulations ; he persists in laying down rules. His poem, which would almost seem a commentary on the Rolls of Parliament, resembles still more closely the Book of Statutes, or even the “*Liber Albus*,” wherein are recorded the municipal regulations of London.³ Like the legislators of the City, he is without mercy for adulterators of all kinds, especially adulterators of edibles, brewers, bakers, butchers, cooks. No pillories are high enough for them ; “they poyssoun the peple” ; their wealth is a shame ; if they trafficked honestly they

¹ To prevent the chilling of their stomach.

² B. vi. 309. In France, likewise, labourers now expected “vins, viandes et autres cheses.” Ordinance of 1354, Isambert, vol. iv. p. 700.

³ “*Munimenta Gildhallæ*,” Riley (Rolls). *E.g.*, “Est ordeiné que le pris d’un joeven chapon ne passe trois deniers, d’un auncien quatre deniers,” for no other cause but that capons both young and ancient are too expensive. Year 1363, “*Rotuli Parliamentorum*,” vol. iii. p. 280.

could not build such fine houses, "thei tymbred nought so heighe."¹

Interdiction to carry gold and silver out of the kingdom (all coin found on travellers embarking at Dover and "that bereth signe of the kynges" should be confiscated);² hatred of Lombard and Jew bankers;³ hatred and scorn of the royal purveyors;

¹ Meires and maceres (mace-bearers) · that menes ben bitwene
The kyng and the comune · to kepe the lawes,
To punyschen on pillories · and pynyng stoles
Brewesteres and bakesteres · bocheres and cokes;
For thise aren men on this molde · that moste harme worcheth
To the pore peple · that parcel-mele buggen.
For they poysoun the peple · priveliche and oft,
Thei rychen thorw regraterye · and rentes hem buggen
With that the pore peple · shulde put in here wombe;
For toke thei on trewly · thei tymbred nought so heighe,
Ne boughte non burgages (tenements) · be ye ful certeyne.
(B. iii. 76.)

² And no man . . .
Bere no selver over see · that bereth signe of the kyng,
Nouther grotes ne gold i-grave · with the kynges coroune,
Uppon forfet of that fe · hose hit fynde at Dover,
Bote hit beo marchaund othur his men · or messenger with
lettres.
(A. iv. 110.)

³ "Coveytise" confesses having been one of those "retonsores monetæ" against whom many regulations have been framed, a trick he has learnt from Lombards and Jews:

I lerned amonge Lumbardes · and Jewes a lessoun
To wey pens with a peys · and pare the hevyest.

B. v. 242. See also C. v. 194. In the same year when the B text was written, the Commons declared that the Lombards "ne servent de rien fors de mal faire"; they must be expelled; many who go under the name of Lombards being spies, "come plusours de ceux qui sont tenuz Lombardz sont Juys et Sarazins et privées

horror of the confusion arising from that right of "maintenance" thanks to which a sort of "bravi," wearing the livery of their master, committed all manner of misdeeds impossible to punish; hatred of forestallers, of fraudulent merchants: all the hatreds, all the prohibitions which appear, in such numbers, in the collections of mediæval laws, are found in the Visions.¹

Like the Commons, Langland, as we have seen, is in favour of peace with France; his attention is concentrated on matters purely English; distant wars fill him with anxiety. He would willingly have kept to the peace of Brétigny;² he hopes the Crusades may not recommence. Instead of killing the Saracens, Christians should convert them; and all those bishops of Nazareth

espies." They have introduced in the country "un trop horrible vice que ne fait pas à nomer." Good Parliament of 1376.

¹ Wrongs of "Wronge" (see *supra*, p. 35):

And thanne come Pees in-to parlement · and put forthe a bille
How Wronge ageines his wille · had his wyf taken . . .
He borwed of me bayard · he broughte hym home nevre,
Ne no ferthyng ther-fore · for naughte I couthe plede.
He meyneteneth his men · to morthen myn hewen,
Forestalleth my feyres · and fighteth in my chepyng,
And breketh up my bernis dore · and bereth aweye my whete,
And taketh (gives) me but a taile · for ten quarteres of otes . . .
I am noughte hardy for hym · uneth to loke.

B. iv. 47. All those wrongs are dealt with at the request of the Commons, in innumerable statutes. Concerning "maintenance," see, among others: 1 Ed. III. st. 2, ch. 4; 4 Ed. III. ch. 11; 10 Ed. III. st. 2; 20 Ed. III. ch. 4, 5, 6; 25 Ed. III. ch. 4; 1 Rich. II. ch. 7, &c. Concerning forestallers and similar people: 25 Ed. III. ch. 3; 27 Ed. III. st. 2, ch. 11; 28 Ed. III. ch. 13. Concerning purveyors: 4 Ed. III. ch. 3; 5 Ed. III. ch. 2; 10 Ed. III. st. 2; 25 Ed. III. st. 5; 34 Ed. III. ch. 2; 36 Ed. III. ch. 2, &c.

² C. iv. 242.

or Damascus who live so quietly in Europe, "that hippe aboute in Engelonde,"¹ had much better go, as apostles of peace, and convert their indocile flocks :

For Cryste cleped us alle · come if we wolde,
Sarasenes and scismatikes · and so he did the Jewes.²

II.

In the well-ordered England of our poet's dreams, under the King and Parliament, who are the law-makers, each class will have to perform a special function and not encroach on that of others. The knight must draw his sword to defend the priest and the labourer ;³ he must kill the hares, foxes, and boars that destroy the crops, and with his falcons he must hunt the wild-fowl.

. . . Kepe · holikirke and my-selve (*i.e.* P. Plowman)

Fro wastoures and fro wykked men · that this worldes truyeth
(destroy),

And go hunte hardiliche · to hares and to foxes,

To bores and to brockes · that breketh adown myne hegges,

And go affaite the faucones · wilde foules to kille.⁴

¹ B. xv. 557.

² B. xi. 114.

³ The Commons express the same wishes : " *Que ceux seigneurs et autres (possessed on the coasts) y soient comandez sur grande peyne de faire lour demoere en leurs possessions pres de la mier par la cause suis dite* " (the defence of the kingdom). Good Parliament of 1376. See also the speech of John Philpot against the slackness of the nobles, "*Chronicon Angliæ*" ("Rolls"), p. 199. Wyclif denounces to the same intent the grant of "worldly lordschipis" to churchmen, who "reulen not the peple ne meyntene the lond as lordis" ; and he writes a tract to show that "for thre skillis lordis schulden constreine clerkis to lyve in mekenesse, wilful povert, and discrete penaunce and gostly traveile." "Select English Works," ed. Arnold, vol. iii. p. 213.

⁴ B. vi. 28.

He must live in the open air and not be an emaciated dreamer. There are knights who fast and lead a life of privation, who, to mortify themselves, wear no shirt: they do wrong. Let them take to their shirts again, and leave fasting to those whose business it is.¹ But, says Langland, always in favour of the golden mean, do not let them, under the pretext that austerities are not their concern, go to the other extreme;² let them beware of parasites and sycophants, "flaterers and lyers," of those professional fools, "fool sages," whom "lordes and ladyes and legates of holy churche" entertain in their dwellings, that those scamps may "do them laughe." They

¹ . . . Trewelicche to fyghte,
Ys the profession and the pure ordre · that apendeth to
knyghtes . . .
For thei shoulde nat faste · ne for-bere sherte;
Bote feithfulliche defende · and fyghte for truthe.

(C. ii. 96, 99.)

² Cf. "Richard the Redeless," on the extravagant dress of the period. Some lords devote all their money to adorning themselves; and when they have spent much on some new dress, they have it all re-cut again on the slightest remark of their Felice or Pernell: so sensitive they are:

. . . They kepeth no coyne · that cometh to here hondis,
But chaunchyth it ffor cheynes · that in Chepe hangith . . .
And, but if the slevis · slide on the erthe,
Thei wolle be wroth as the wynde · and warie hem that it
made . . .

And if Felice ffonde ony ffaute · thenne of the makynge,
Yt was y-sent sone · to shape of the newe.

Still one must be dressed according to one's rank:

Yit blame I no burne (being) · to be, as him oughte,
In comliche clothinge · as his statt axith.

(R. R. iii. 138, 152, 160, 173.)

will always find quantities of strolling players, tellers of vain tales, tumblers who turn somersaults and indulge in indecent gestures, besieging their doors. All these vagabond minstrels are "the fendes procuratores;"¹ if wanderers interest you, take pity on the vanquished in life's combat, on the real poor, not on the idle who beg rather than work, but on those who suffer and labour, the wounded, maimed, defeated. Your minstrels make you laugh after dinner? the poor are "godes mynstrales,"² they will make you laugh in the hour when life's feast shall draw to its close; thanks to them you will have then a smile on your lips.

And ye, lovely ladies • with youre longe fynghes,
you too have duties; use those slim hands to embroider chasubles for the churches; wives and widows, weave wool and hemp to clothe the poor, and teach your

¹ Ye lordes and ladyes • and legates of holy church,
That feden fool sages • flaterers and lyers,
And han lykyng to lythen hem • in hope to do yow
lawghe . . .
In youre deth-deynge • ich drede me sore
Lest tho manere men • to moche sorwe yow brynge. . . .
. . . Flaterers and foles • aren the fendes procuratores,
Entysen men thorgh here tales • to synne and to harlotrie . . .
Clerkus and knyghtes • welcometh kynges mynstrales . . .
Muche more, me thenketh • riche men auhte
Have beggers by-fore hem • whiche beth godes mynstrales . . .
Ther-for ich rede yow riche • reveles when ye maken
For to solace youre soules • suche mynstrales to have . . .
Thuse . . . manere mystrales • maken a man to lauhe
In hus deth deynge.

(C. viii. 82, *et seq.*)

² A word derived from St. Francis, who used to say that his mendicant friars would be God's minstrels, "joculatores Dei."

daughters the serious duties of life and the works of mercy.¹

The merchants, who have acquired great wealth, must use the superfluity of their riches for the common weal ; they must endow "*meson-dieux*," those refuges for poor wretches ; they must devote themselves to that pious work, so important in the Middle Ages, the restoration of broken bridges and the improvement of "*wikkede weyes*" ; they must "*maydenes helpen*" and pay for the support of poor scholars : all of them good works, which were really practised by the best among the rich merchants of Hull, Bristol, and London, whose number and influence were already very considerable in the XIVth century.²

Piers Plowman shall feed every one ; he is the mainspring of the State ; he realises that ideal of disinterestedness, conscience, reason, which fills the

¹ . . . with your longe fynGRES,
That ye han silke and sendal · to sowe whan tyme is,
Chesibles for chapelleyne · cherches to honoure.
Wyves and wydwe · wolle and flex spynneth,
Maketh cloth, I conseille yow · and kenneth so yowre
doughtres ;
The nedy and the naked · nymmeth (take) hede how hij
liggeth (be). (B. vi. 10.)

² . . . Save the wynnynGES,
Amenden *meson-dieux* ther-with · and myseyse men fynde,
And wikkede weyes · with here good amende,
And brygges to-broke · by the heye weyes
Amende in som manere wise · and maydenes helpen ;
Poure puple bedredene · and prisiones in stockes,
Fynde hem for Godes love · and fauntekynes to scole ;
Releve religion · and renten hem bettere.
(C. x. 29.)



God spide þe mæn 7 sende us kore 7 m

"TREUTHE'S PILGRYME ATTE FLOW."
From the MS. R. 3. 14, in Library of Trinity College, Cambridge.

soul of our poet ; he is the real hero of the work. Bent over the soil, patient as the oxen that he goads, he performs each day his sacred task ; the years pass over his whitening head, and, from the dawn of life to its twilight, he follows ceaselessly the same endless furrow, pursuing behind his plough his eternal pilgrimage.

I wil worschip ther-with · Treuth, bi my lyve
And ben his pilgryme atte plowe · for pore mennes sake.¹

Around him the idle sleep, the careless sing ; they pretend to cheer others by their humming ; they trill : “Hoy ! trolly lolly !” Piers shall feed everyone, except these useless ones ; he shall not feed “Jakke the jogeloure and Jonet . . . and Danyel the dys-playere and Denote the baude, and frere the faytoure, . . .”² for, all those whose name is entered “in the legende of lif,”³ must take life seriously. There is no place in this world for people who are not earnest ; every class that is content to perform its duties imperfectly and without sincerity, that fulfils them without eagerness, without passion, without pleasure, without striving to attain the best possible result and do better than the preceding generation, will perish. So much the more surely shall perish the class that ceases to justify its privileges by its

¹ B. vi. 103. For a full description of Piers, see B. v. 544, and the whole of passus vi.

² B. vi. 71. The same sort of people were very troublesome in France too. Jean-le-Bon expelled from Paris “telles gens oïseux ou joueurs de dés ou enchanteurs ès rues ou truandeurs ou mendians.” January 30, 1350, Isambert, iv. p. 576.

³ C. xii. 206.

services : this is the great law brought forward in our own day by Taine. Langland lets loose upon the indolent, the careless, the busy-bodies who talk much and work little, a foe more terrible and more real than now : Hunger.¹ Piers undertakes the care of all sincere people, and Hunger looks after the rest. Hunger recommends, however, that some allowance of food be granted to everybody, to those "faitours" even who might work if they chose, "bold beggeres and bigge."² But the food must be so unpalatable ("houndes bred and hors bred") that they will prefer work, and have an improvement in their diet :

And yf the gromes grucche · bid hem go swynke.³

This, says Hunger, is "a wysdome." The same "wysdome" has resulted since in the creation of workhouses. The poet continues, examining problem after problem ; laying down rules, foreshadowing

¹ C. ix. 169.

² This passage, which is also to be found in B (written in 1376-7), must be compared to the protest of the Commons, in the Good Parliament of 1376, against those "laboreres corores," who "devenont mendinantz beggeres pur mesner ocious vic . . . et bien purroient eser la commune pur vivre sour lour labour et service, si ils voudroient servir." "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 340. Cf. also "Romaunt of the Rose" (translation attributed to Chaucer) :

No man, up peyne to be dede,
Mighty of body, to begge his brede,
If he may swynke it for to gete
Men shulde hym rather mayme or bete
Or done of hym apert justice
Than suffren hym in such malice. (l. 6619.)

³ C. ix. 227.

reforms, showing himself harsh or merciful according to the occasion. All this part of the Visions is mainly an eloquent declaration of man's duties.

Langland is very hard on lawyers. He seems to have frequented Westminster, which was, so to speak, their capital; he sees in them incorrigible adepts of Lady Meed, who cannot say or write a word without being paid :

Thow myght bet mete the myst · on Malverne hulles,
Than gete a mom (word) of hure mouth · til moneye be hem
shewid.¹

He admires the charity of the Jews toward each other, which Christians would do well to imitate.²

The poet eulogises marriage at great length. There seem to have been people, in the XIVth century, who preferred rich girls to pretty ones, "thauh hue (they) be loveliche to loken on."³ Langland denounces this inconceivable abuse. The gravity of his principles does not prevent his worship of feminine beauty; the ill-assorted unions contracted by fortune-hunters produce "no children," but "foule wordes."⁴ What can

¹ C. xi. 163.

² Allas ! that a Cristene creature · shal be unkynde til an other,
Sitthen Juwes that we jugge · Judas felawes,
Ayther of hem helpeth other · of that that hym nedeth.

(B. ix. 83.)

³ C. xi. 259.

⁴ Many a peire sithen the pestilence · han plight hem togideres ;
The fruit that thei brynge forth · aren foule wordes . . .
Have thei no children but cheste · and choppyng hem bitwene.
(B. ix. 164.)

be said of those young men who marry, for their money,
old women

That nevere shal barne bere · but if it be in armes ? ¹

And as for the illegitimate unions that have multiplied
in the general confusion resulting from the great plague,
it is far worse : the poet expects only evil from bastard
children ; most of the wretches with which the world
is pestered, were “ false folke faithlees,”

. . . out of wedloke, I trowe,

Conceyved ben in yvel time · as Caym was on Eve.²

III.

While thus traversing the different social strata,
Langland sometimes halts for an instant, looks about
him, and tells us what he sees. He stops in the “ Cour
des Miracles ” where sham cripples “ leyde here legges
aliri as such loseles conneth,” or else disfigured them-
selves to simulate blindness :

Tho (then) were faitoures aferde · and feyned hem blynde,
Somme leyde here legges aliri · as suche loseles conneth,
And made here mone to Pieres · and preyde hym of grace :
“ For we have no lymes to laboure with · lorde, y-graced be ye !
Ac we preye for yow, Pieres · and for yowre plow bothe,
That God of his grace · yowre grayne multiplye,
And yelde yow of yowre almesse · that ye give us here ;
For we may noughte swynke ne swete · suche sikeness us eyleth ! ”

Piers muses and wonders :

“ If it be soth,” quod Pieres, “ that ye seyne · I shal it sone
asspye ; ” ³

and, with the help of Truth, he soon discovers in what

¹ B. ix. 163. ² B. ix. 118. ³ B. vi. 123 ; see also C. x. 169.

miraculous way they have been transformed, and got their "legges aliri."

He seats himself by the hearth of the Plowman, and looks into the stew-pot ; he rises and opens the larder. Such misery ! and at the same time such resignation ! What can Piers offer his guest ?

“I have no peny,” quod Peres · “poletes for to bigge,
Ne neyther gees ne grys (pigs) · but two grene cheses,
A fewe cruddes and creem · and an haver cake,
And two loves of benes and bran · y-bake for my fauntis.

Were it "Lammas tyme" (August 1) there would be :

heruest in my croft ;

And thanne may I dighte thi dyner · as me dere liketh.

The guest has therefore to be content with "benes and baken apples," and "ripe chiries manye." ¹

Langland, one winter evening, enters the hut of a peasant "charged with children," crushed by the rent owing to the landlord; he sees the starving young ones, the wife half-dead from fatigue, roused at night by the cries of her last-born, and obliged to leave her pallet in order to rock the cradle:

. . . Reuthe is to rede · othere in ryme shewe
The wo of these women · that wonyeth in cotes,

women whom, in spite of all their sufferings and those of their husbands and little ones, nothing could induce to beg ! Pity, cries the poet, have pity on these wretches,

[That] beth abasshed for to begge * and wolle nat be aknowe
What hem needeth at here neihebores.

¹ B. vi. 282.

No one had before shown so much pity, and such keen human sympathy ; while turning the pages of the old book, it is impossible not to find, to this very day, that, as the poet himself said, "reuthe is to rede."¹

Langland rests, too, by the fireside of the rich, in one of those castles where he sometimes dined at the side-table, silent, observing everything, taking note of his own feelings, ashamed to be there, only invited because he sang psalms in his chantry for the departed members of the family, playing, in fact, the hated part of parasite. Around him are sudden bursts of joy, there is deep drinking and loud talking ; the minstrels tell the loves of the brave, accompanying themselves with music ; or else they execute in the middle of the hall absurd gambols and indecent contorsions.² When they have become silent, conversations flow on at the upper table, under the "dais" ; grave problems are lightly treated ; between two tales the mystery of the Holy Trinity is discussed. When they have eaten their fill, they "gnawen God !"

Atte mete in her murthes • whan mynstralles ben stille,
 Thanne telleth thei of trinite • a tale other tweyne,
 And bringen forth a balled (bald) resoun • and take Bernard to
 witnessse,
 And putten fort a presumpsioun • to preve the sothe.
 Thus they dryvele at her deyse • the deite to knowe,
 And gnawen God with the gorge • whan her gutte is fulle.³

In some houses, as luxury spreads, the lord and lady refuse to dine in public, in the hall, where the dependents of the family used to eat at the side-tables or even on the

¹ C. x. 32. See the whole passage in Appendix, VIII.

² B. xiii. 228.

³ B. x. 52.

floor,¹ where the fire burned in the centre of the room, and the smoke found vent, if so disposed, through a hole in the roof.² Now, the lord and lady retire to "pryve parloure . . . or in a chambre with a chymneye,"³ and there they hesitate still less to criticise the holy doctrines :

I have yherde hiegh men · etyng atte table,
 Carpen as thei clerkes were · of Cryste and of his mightes . . .
 "Whi wolde owre Saveoure suffre · suche a worme in his blisse,
 That bigyled the womman · and the man after ? . . .
 Whi shulde we that now ben · for the werkes of Adam,
 Roten and to-rende ? . . .⁴

They live in comfort and content, and the presence of the poor no longer offends their eyes ; the sight of such unheard-of luxury fills the poet with apprehension. Let us return, thinks he, to *Piers Plowman* ; those satisfied and critical rich people are the danger of the State ; *Piers* will be its safeguard.

¹ Right as sum man geve me mete · and sette me amydde the
 flore,

Ich have mete more than ynough · ac nought so moche worship
 As tho that seten atte syde-table · or with the sovereignes of
 the halle,

But sitte as a begger bordelees · bi my-self on the grounde.

(B. xii. 198.)

² A good example of this is the hall of Penshurst in Kent.

³ Elyng is the halle · uche daye in the wyke
 There the lorde ne the lady · lyketh noughte to sytte.
 Now hath vche riche a reule · to eten bi hym-selve
 In a pryve parloure · for pore mennes sake,
 Or in a chambre with a chymneye · and leve the chief halle,
 That was made for meles · men to eten inne . . . (B. x. 94.)

⁴ B. x. 101.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHURCH.

I.

THE life led by Langland on the confines of civil and religious society allowed him to become well acquainted with and pass judgments on both ; and he did not fail to do it.

The special kind of curiosity that moves him has been already noticed. Although attentive to what is great, beautiful, and brilliant, he feels, at the same time, by a strange and rare combination, a curiosity for small, obscure, and dark things. Crevices, crannies, and anfractuosities attract him ; parasitic plants, night-birds, things that creep in the shade or nestle in the hollows of ancient walls, interest him ; he flashes his lantern into crumbling vaults, and likes to dazzle with its sudden light drowsy owls who thought themselves safe and forgotten there. This same instinct which characterised the Middle Ages, and caused the sculptor to minutely carve the scarcely visible nooks and corners of wainscots and friezes, key-stones, misericords of stalls, directs Langland's pen. His poem abounds in satirical vignettes ; the deep voice of the organ resounds through

the nave ; but listen, and you will hear a sound, as of laughter, in the indistinct murmur of the echoes.

✠ Langland scoffs, not at divine things, but at the human element that mingles with them. In religious as in civil matters, he attacks abuses, not institutions ; he reveres the dogmas, and even respects most of the observances. Here, again, the harshness of his words has given rise to many erroneous opinions ; some have seen in him a destroyer, like Wyclif ; others have even made of him a Wyclifite. He only agrees, however, with his famous contemporary in censuring excesses and abuses ; but differs from him, inasmuch as he desires to alter neither the dogmas nor the hierarchy of the Church. He cannot be said to have ever praised Wyclif's " Poor Priests." ¹ In religious as in secular matters, Langland

¹ And allé parfite preestes to poverte sholde drawe.

C. xiv. 100. I do not think it possible to see in this " an obvious and interesting allusion to Wyclif's so-called poor priests " (Skeat's Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. 175). The description that follows of the sort of priests, for whom alone the favour of the ordination ought to be reserved by bishops is very different from Wyclif's ideal. The priests, besides, whom Langland here has in view, are secular priests, performing normal duties in their parishes (who ought not to take silver " for masses that [they] syngen "), not at all Wyclif's wanderers, who went about, preaching from village to village. Langland hates all those who perform religious functions contrary to rule, custom, and good order. The Commons hate them too, and say (year 1382) : " Notorie chose est coment ya plusours [malveis] personnes deinz le dit roialme [qui,] alantz de countée en countée en certains habitz souz dissimulacion de grant saintée et sanz licence de Seint pière le pape ou des ordinairs des lieux . . . prèchent . . . diverses prédications conteignantes heresyas et erreurs notoires." They concern themselves also with temporal matters, " pur discord et dissencion faire entre divers estatiz dudit roialme." " Statutes of the Realm," 5 Rich. II., st. 2, ch. 5.

sides, not with Wyclif, but, heart and soul, with the Commons of England.

Like the Commons, he recognises the religious authority of the Pope, but protests against the Pope's encroachments, and against the interference of the sovereign pontiff in temporal matters. The extension assumed by the papal power in England appears to him excessive ; like the Commons, he is in favour of the statutes of " Provisors " and " Præmunire," and wishes to have them maintained and renewed. Those persons who get from the Pope presentations to benefices before the death of the incumbents, and in violation of the rights of the English patrons, inspire him with the deepest scorn. We have seen that he represents " Sire Symonye " saddling and bridling " palfreyswyse " one of these creatures without a conscience, evidently considering him the fittest steed Symonye could use ; and the hated one travels in this fashion, through the kingdom, to Westminster. On questions of this kind, Langland often agrees with Wyclif ; it will be usually found that both share on these points the ideas of Parliament.

Langland protests, with the Commons, against the existence of a papal army, and against the wars in which the sovereign pontiff has got entangled :

For were preest-hod more parfyt • that is, the pope formest,
That with moneye menteyneth men • to werren up-on cristine . . .
Hus prayers with hus pacience • to pees sholde brynge
Alle londes to love • and that in a litel tyme ;
The pope with alle preestes • *pax vobis* sholde make.¹

¹ C. xviii. 233. Same idea again B. xix. 426, 440 (C. xxii. 429, 446).

He is of opinion that the wealth of the Church is hurtful to her :

Whenne Constantyn of hus cortesy · holykirke dowede
 With londes and leedes (tenements) · lordshepes and rentes,
 An angel men hurde · an hih at Rome crye—
 “ *Dos ecclesie* this day · hath ydrunken venym,
 And tho that han Petres power · aren poysoned alle.”¹

According to him, the prelates should be purged of such a poison. He openly calls upon the secular arm to accomplish this : 4 .

Taketh here londes, ye lordes · and leet hem lyve by dymes,
 Yf ye kynges coveyten · in Cristene pees to lyven.²

And God amende the pope · that pileth holykirke,
 And cleymeth bifor the kyng · to be keper over Crystene.
 And counteth nought though Crystene · ben culled and robbed,
 And fynt (provides) folke to fyghte · and Cristene blod to spille.³

The same idea was expressed by the Commons, when they said : “ Item, let it be remembered that there is no man in the world, loving God and the Holy Church,

¹ C. xviii. 220.

² C. xviii. 227. Wyclif agrees and promises no less a recompense than heaven, to the lords who will perform this office : “Thre thingis schulden meve Lordis to compelle clerkis to this holy lif of Cris and his apostlis. . . . Kingis and lordis schulden witte that thei ben mynystris and vikeris of God to venge synne and ponysche mysdoeris. . . . Certis yif lordis don wel this office, thei schullen sikerly come to the blisse of hevene.” “Select English Works,” vol. iii. pp. 213, 214, 215. The same ideas were current in France also; the legists had popularised them long before Langland and Wyclif wrote; they are to be found again in literary works, such as “Le Songe du Vergier,” and others (*temp.* Charles V.).

³ B. xix. 439.

the king and the kingdom of England, who has not great cause for thought, sadness, and tears, because the court of Rome, which ought to be the fountain, root, and source of holiness, the destroyer of covetousness, of simony, and of other sins, has so subtly, piece by piece, and more and more, as time goes, by sufferance and by abet of wicked ones . . . drawn to itself the presentations to the bishoprics, dignities, and other benefices of Holy Church in England." The Commons add still more forcibly : "Be it again remembered that God has committed his flock to the care of our Holy Father the Pope, that they might be fed and not shorn ! " ¹

The cardinals, legates of the Holy See, are also one of the means through which this excessive power is exercised. All those cardinals, who come to us from the Pope, we have, "we clerkes," to pay for them, to provide for their "pelure" and "palfreyes mete" ; we have to entertain the robbers, "piloures," who follow them. They give the example of disorderly life.²

¹ "Item fait à penser qu'il n'y ad null homme de mounde qe cyme Dieu et Seint Esglise, le roi et le roialme d'Engleterre qi n'ad grante matière de penser, de tristesse et de lermes, de ce qe la cour de Rome, qi deust estre fontaigne, racyne et source de seintité et destruction de covetise, de symonie et des autres pecchés, ad si sotilement, de poi en poi et de plus en plus, par procès du temps, par soeffrance et par abbet des malveys . . . attret à lui les collations des eveschiez, dignitez, provendrez et des autres bénéfices de Seint Esglise en Angleterre. . . . Item fait à penser qe Dieux ad commys ses ouwelles à Nostre Seint Pier le Pape à pastourer et non pas à tounder." Year 1376, "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. pp. 337, 338.

² I am a curatour of holykyrke · and come nevre in my tyme
Man to me, that me couthe telle · of cardinale vertues . . .

Those holy men ought to remain, all embalmed in their holiness, at Avignon, the right place for them "amonge the Juwes—be you saints among the saints!"

Be verrey God, I wolde
That no cardynal come · amonge the comune peple,
But in her holynesse · holden hem stille
At Avynoun, amonge the Juwes · *cum sancto sanctus eris*,
Or in Rome, as here rule wole · the reliques to kepe.¹

As will be remembered, Avignon was a city of refuge for Jews, and Langland shares the sentiments of the Commons of the Good Parliament towards what they do not hesitate to term "la peccherouse cité d'Avenon."

The bishops, who for their part did not care to have quarrels with the "cité d'Avenon," were accordingly very remiss, as Langland thought, in struggling against the encroachments of the Pope in England; whereupon

I knewe nevre cardynal · that he ne cam fro the pope,
And we clerkes whan they come · for her comunes payeth,
For her pelure and her palfreyes mete · and piloures that hem
folweth,

The comune *clamat cotidie* · eche man to other :

"The contre is the curseder · that cardynales come inne ;

And there they ligge and lenge moste · lecherye there regneth."

B. xix. 408. The "Collector" of the Pope was the subject of much obloquy; he lived splendidly in London, being, if any was, an "emperoure bishop," to use Wyclif's word: "Item le dit collectour est receivour des deniers du Pape et tient un grant hostel en Loundres et clerks et officers, come ceo fuit droitement la receite d'un Prince ou d'un Duk." Year 1376, "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii, p. 339.

¹ B. xix. 417. On cardinals and on their power to elect the Pope ("To han that power that Peter hadde inpugnen I nelle"), see B. Prol. 109.

he handles them with great severity ; and represents them as clients of Lady Meed :

Heo (she) blessedde the bisschopes • though that thei ben lewed.¹

In their turn, these unworthy prelates append their seals to bulls and licences granting low wretches permission to preach all over the country and to exhibit false relics, which should never be done were the bishop "worth both his eres."² The cleverest and most ambitious among ecclesiastics are careful never to remain with their flock in some distant county, and never think to "shryven here paroschienes, prechen and prey for hem" ; but they go to London, and there live very happy ;³ they aspire to and obtain public functions, or sometimes private ones, not less pleasant and remunerative. Masters and doctors become domesticated :

Some serven the kyng • and his silver tellen,
In cheker and in chancerye • chalengen his dettes . . .
And some serven az servantz • lordes and ladyes,
And in stede of stuwardes • sytten and demen.⁴

While all this is going on, superstition flourishes ;

¹ A. iii. 144.

² A. Prol. 75.

³ Bischopes and bachelers • bothe maistres and doctours,
That han cure under Criste • and crounyng (tonsure) in tokne
And signe thet thei sholden • shryven here paroschienes,
Prechen and prey for hem • and the pore fede,
Liggen in London • in lenten an elles. (B. Prol. 87.)

⁴ B. Prol. 92. This is one of the cases in which Langland, the Commons, and Wyclif all agree. Wyclif denounces "our bischopis that pressen to be chaunseller and tresorers and governours of alle worldly offices in the rewme." "Select English Works," Arnold, vol. ii. p. 281 ; vol. iii. p. 335.

the flock, for whom nobody cares, run 'to see false miracles, and place all their trust in candles, "much wex"; in offerings, "ontrewe sacrifice," made on account of sham relics :

. . . Ydolatrie ye soffren · in sondrye places menyne,
And boxes ben brought forth · i-bounden with yre,
To under-take the tol · of ontrewe sacrifice.
In menyng of miracles · much wex ther hangeth.¹

On all these points, Langland agrees with the Commons, who complain of the same disorders. The Parliament demands, as does the poet, that the king should only have laymen, "lays gentz," for his ministers, and that "no other persons but laymen be hereafter made chancellor, treasurer, clerk of the privy seal, baron of the exchequer, comptroller, or appointed to any of the great offices and governorships of the kingdom."² The king, in his answer, promises nothing; he will "advise" with his council, that is, he means to continue acting as heretofore.

The appointment of unworthy bishops, by favour of Lady Meed, and the indifference they feel concerning the salvation of their parishioners, are thus commented upon by the Commons: formerly, "bishoprics, as well as other benefices of Holy Church, used to be, after true elections, in accordance with saintly considerations and pure charity, assigned to people found to be worthy

¹ C. i. 96. On false miracles, see "English Wayfaring Life," pp. 340 *et seq.*

² "Que nulles autres persones soient desoreenavant faitz chancellor, trésorier, clerk du privé seal, barouns de l'eschequer, countre-rolour et touz autres grantz officers et gouverours du roialme." Year 1371, 45 Ed. III., "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol ii. p. 304.

of clerical promotion, men of clean life and holy behaviour, whose intention it was to stay on their benefices, there to preach, visit and shrive their parishioners, and spend the goods of Holy Church in works of charity." ¹

This is, word for word, what Langland says. Most of the evils in the kingdom, wars, pestilences, &c., are owing to the fact that Simony now reigns, and Lady Meed triumphs. "And as long as these good customs were observed," the Commons continue, "the kingdom was filled with all kinds of prosperity, such as good people, and loyal clerks and clergy, knights and chivalry, which are things that always go together, peace, and quiet, treasure, wheat, cattle, and other riches. And since the good customs have become perverted into the sin of covetousness and simony, the kingdom has been full of divers adversities, such as wars and pestilences, famine, murrain of cattle, and other grievances." ²

Whereas benefices should be given "graciously, out of pure charity, without price and without payment," they are for sale, and, owing to the example of Rome,

¹ In former times, "si soloient les eveschés [par] verreye election, et les autres bénéfices de Seint Eglise, par seint considération et pure charité, sanz scrupule de covetyse ou de symonie, estre doné as gentz plus dignez de clergie, de nette vie et de seinte conversation qe pont estre trovez, qe voloient demurer sur lour bénéfices, prêcher, visiter et confesser lour parochiens, et despandre les biens de Seinte Eglise . . . en overez de charité."

² Good Parliament of 1376. "Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 337. Cf. Langland :

And tho was plente and pees · amonges pore and riche . . .
And now is werre and wo.

(B. xv. 500, 504.)

lay patrons require now to be paid in their turn. The result of these evil practices is precisely that pointed out by the poet. "And thus, by means of simony and barter," the Commons say, "a sorry fellow who knows nothing of what he ought ("though that thei ben lewed," wrote Langland) and is worthless, will be advanced to parishes and prebends of the value of a thousand marcs, when a doctor of decree and a master of divinity will be only too glad to secure some little benefice of the value of twenty marcs." And thus "dwindles Clergye towards nothingness."¹

What good can one expect, thinks Langland, of these favourites of Lady Meed? In what do they resemble Christ their model, and the saints who imitated Him? Christ suffered and died,

And baptised and bishoped · with the blode of his herte.²

Since then, many saints have suffered for the faith, in India and Egypt, and Armenia or Spain. St. Thomas of Canterbury died a cruel death for the love of Christ and for the rights also of this kingdom :

For Cristes love he deyede,
And for the right of al this reume.³

Our prelates nowadays have ceased to thirst for martyrdom ; and bishops of Bethlehem and Babylon

¹ "Et tout ensy, par voye de symonie et de brocage, un cheitif, qe null bien ne sciet et riens ne vaut serra avances as Esglises et provendres à la value de mill marcz, par là un Doctour de Decré et un meistre de divinité serra lée d'aver un petit bénéfice de xx marcz." And thus goes Clergye "en declyn et à nient." Same Parliament of 1376, "Rotuli," vol. ii. p. 338.

² B. xv. 545.

³ B. xv. 552.

are seen amongst us; they do not go to Syria, but stay in England.

The whole ecclesiastical hierarchy, though he is in favour of maintaining it, is severely handled by Langland. Chaucer has presented to us the picture of the good parson, devoted to his parishioners, treading the muddy paths in winter to go and visit the humblest cottages. Langland prefers to show us the other side of the canvas, and there he draws several portraits of the hunting parson, lazy, jovial, hard drinking; a great teller of tales, who knows by heart all the songs of Robin Hood and the gest of Randal, earl of Chester, who has taken unto himself a female companion and enlivened his fireside with a few bastards.¹

This worthy man enjoys sitting at table with other choice spirits, quaffing ale and laughing at improper stories. He rises so late that he gets to church only in time to hear "Ite missa est"; he can "neither solfe ne synge"; he is incapable of interpreting the least

¹ Lady Meed

Provendreth persones · and prestes meyntheneth,
To have lemmanes and lotebies · alle here lif-dayes,
And bringen forth barnes · agein forbode lawes.

B. iv. 149. To the same intent again, the Commons ask that benefices be withdrawn from "gentz de Seint Esglise, bénéficez et curats qe tiegnent lour concubines par certain temps overtement." Year 1372, "*Rotuli Parliamentorum*," vol. ii. p. 314. Compare, in the "*Romaunt of the Rose*," the description of

. . . these that haunt symonye,
Or provost fulle of trecherie,
Or prelat lyvyng jolily,
Or prest that halt his quene hym by.

(Line 7021.) Translation, attributed to Chaucer, in Morris's edition of Chaucer's Works, vol. vi.

passage of Scripture for his parishioners ; but there lives not his like for finding a hare sitting. If he mutters a few prayers, his thoughts are far away :

That I telle with my tonge · is two myle fro myne herte.¹

This is the result of the recruiting of the clergy to which the bishops lend themselves :

For made nevere kyng no knyghte · but he hadde catel to
spende

As bifel for a knyghte . . .

The bisshop shal be blamed · bifer God, as I leve,

That crouneth suche Goddes knyghtes · that conneth nought
sapienter

Synge, ne psalmes rede · ne segge a messe of the day.²

II.

The regular clergy are treated with less severity by the poet. Wrath penetrates into their midst, but is so badly received that he hastens to depart, seeing that if he tells the least tale he is sentenced to fast upon bread and water, or else he has to appear in the chapter-house, there to receive a whipping on his breechless skin, “as I a childe were.” Therefore he has decided to go, having no liking for their unpalatable fishes “and fieble ale drynke.”³

¹ B. v. 400 *et seq.* See complete text in Appendix, VII.

² B. xi. 285, 303.

³ And if I telle any tales · thei taken hem togyderes,
And do me faste frydayes · to bred and to water,
And am chalanged in the chapitel hous · as I a childe were,
And baleised on the bare . . . and no breche bitwene ;
For-thi have I no lykyng · with tho leodes to wonye.
I ete there unthende fische · and fieble ale drynke.

(B. v. 172.)

Wrath's chastisement was that of offending monks; they were flogged before the central-column found in many of the chapter-houses of England. The same personage had likewise paid a visit to a nunnery, but with better success. There his gossipings take effect. He goes retailing to one and another the most unbecoming slanders:

[I] made hem joutes of jangelynge¹ · that dame Johanne was a
 bastard
 And dame Claryce a knightes doughter · ac a kokewolde was
 hire syre,
 And dame Peronelle a prestes file · priouresse worth she nevere,
 For she had childe in chirityme² · al owre chapitere it wiste.
 Of wykked wordes, I, Wrath · here wortes³ i-made,
 Til “thow lixe” and “thow lixe” · lopen oute at ones,
 And eyther hitte other · under the cheke;
 Hadde thei hadde knyves, bi Cryst · her eyther had kyllled other.⁴

Though comparatively lenient to monks, Langland copies from them some of the traits he employs to draw the image of new-fangled “Religioun”; in his verses Religioun resembles the hunting and jovial monk in the Canterbury Tales: “Ac now,” says he,

Ac now is Religioun a ryder · a rowmer bi stretes. . . .
 A priker on a palfray · fro manere to manere,

¹ Pottages of scandals.

² Cherry-time.

³ Vegetables; I made for them dishes of wicked words.

⁴ B. v. 158. Compare the misdeeds of “Fals-Semblant” and his peers in the “Romaunt of the Rose”:

Thus from his ladder we hym take,
 And thus his freendis foes we make,
 But word ne wite shal he noon,
 Tille alle hise freendis ben his foon. (line 6939.)

An heep of houndes . . . as he a lorde were,
 And but if his knave knele · that shal his cuppe brynge,
 He loureth (frowns) on hym and axeth hym · who taughte him
 curteisye ? ¹

And Langland is careful to note that he has in view here “bothe monkes and chanouns.” ² In a similar fashion Chaucer’s monk was :

An out-rydere that lovede venerye . . .
 Greyhoundes he hadde as swifte as fowel in flight ;
 Of prikyng and of huntyng for the hare
 Was al his lust. ³

† But, in his heart, the poet has no hate for monks, and when he has converted his lazy one, “Sleuthe,” he makes him resolve to lead a better life, as if he “a monke were” :)

Shal no Sondaye be this sevene yere · but sykenesse it lette
 (prevent),
 That I ne shal do (betake) me er day · to the dere cherche,
 And heren matines and masse · as I a monke were. ⁴

Langland doubtless remembered, with heartfelt emotion, the time he had passed at Malvern, taught by monks, in the precincts of the convent founded by old Aldwin ; and the edge of his severity was taken off. We have seen elsewhere the touching picture he traces

¹ B. x. 306. Compare, in the “Romaunt of the Rose,” the description of those who

. . . willen that folk hem lout and grete
 Whanne that they passen thurgh the strete,
 And wolen be cleped Maister also. (line 6919.)

² C. vi. 157.

³ Prologue, 166.

⁴ B v. 458.

of the studious and tranquil existence led in the cloister by men of good will.¹

III.

Let us go down a few steps, and we reach the strange, grimacing, unpardonable herd of lyers, knaves, and cheats, who traffic in holy things, absolve for money, sell heaven, deceive the simple, and appear as though they "hadden leve to lye al here lyf after." In the nethermost circle of his hell, where he scourges them with incessant raillery, the poet confines pell-mell all these gluttoned unbelievers. Like hardy parasitical plants, they have disjoined the tiles and stones of the sacred edifice, so that the wind steals in, and the rain penetrates; shameless pardoners they are, friars, pilgrims, hermits, with nothing of the saint about them save the garb, whose example, unless a stop is put to it, will teach the world to despise the clerical dress, those who wear it, and the religion even, that tolerates and supports them.

At this depth, and in the dim recesses where he casts the rays of his lantern, Langland spares none; his ferocious laugh is reverberated by the walls, and the scared night-birds take flight. His mirth is not the mirth of Chaucer, itself less light than the mirth of France; not the joyous peal of laughter which rang out on the Canterbury road, welcoming the discourses of the exhibitor of relics, and the far from disinterested sermons of the friar to sick Thomas; it is a woeful and terrible laugh, harbinger of the final catastrophe

¹ B. x. 300. See *supra*, p. 84.

and judgment. What they have heard in the plain of Malvern, the accused ones will hear again in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

They have now no choice, but must come out of their holes; and they come forward into the light of day, hideous and grotesque, saturated with the moisture of their dismal vaults; the sun blinds them, the fresh air makes them giddy. They present a sorry figure. Unlike the pilgrims of Canterbury, they derive no benefit from the feelings of indulgence that softens our hearts on a gay April morn. They will learn to know the difference between the laugh that pardons and the laugh that kills. Langland takes them up, lets them fall, and takes them up again; he never wearies of this cruel sport; he presents them to us now separately, and now collectively: packs of pilgrims, "eremytes on an hep," pilgrims that run to St. James in Spain, to Rome, to Rocamadour in Guyenne, who have paid visits to every saint.¹ But have they ever sought for St. Truth? ² No, never! Will they ever know the real place where they might find St. James? Will they suspect that St. James should "be sought ther poure syke lyggen (lie), in prisons and in poore cotes? . . ." ³ They seek St. James in Spain, and St. James is at their gates; they elbow him each day, and they recognise him not.

¹ B Prol. 46, xii. 37.

² And ye that seke seynte James and seintes of Rome,
Seketh Seynt Treuthe for he may save yow alle.

(B. v. 57.)

³ C. v. 122.

The poet passes on to others, then comes back to them, he strikes again in the same place until the lash cuts their skin ; their words, their dress, their stories, all seem to him equally hideous ; he turns them about, that they may be well seen, with their wallet by their side and “an hundredth of ampulles” on their hats, “signes of Synay and shelles of Galice,” and “keyes of Rome” and also “the vernicle bifore” : for “men shulde knowe and se be his signes” where he has been.¹ Whence have you just come?

“Fram Synay” he seyde · “and fram owre lordes sepulcre ;
In Bethleem and in Babiloyne · I have ben in bothe,
In Ermony, in Alisaundre · in many other places.
Ye may se bi my signes · that sitten on my hatte,
That I have walked ful wyde · in wete and in drye,
And soughte gode seyntes · for my soules helth.”
Knowestow oughte a corseint · that men calle Treuthe?
Coudestow aughte wissen (teach) us the weye · where that wy
(being) dwelleth ?
“Nay, so me God helpe !”²

¹ B. v. 527. The same customs are described by Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence in his poem on Thomas Becket (XIIth century). Crosses are worn as signs that the wearer has been at Jerusalem ; a leaden image of the Virgin means that a pilgrimage has been made to Rocamadour ; a leaden shell, to St. James of Spain ; an ampul, to St. Thomas of Canterbury :

Mes de Jérusalem en est la croiz portée
Et de Rochemadur Marie en plum getée,
De saint Jame la scale, qui est en plum muée,
Or a Deus saint Thomas cele ampule donée
Qui est par tut le mund chérie et honorée.

“La Vic de Saint Thomas le Martyr,” ed. Hippeau, Paris, 1859, 8vo, p. 204.

² B. v. 533.

[The poet will likewise speak his mind to those packs of hermits, sturdy fellows who might work if they chose, but do not choose, who swarm about that great resort of pilgrims, Walsingham, and look very holy with their staff, and live quite merrily with their wench :

Heremites on an heep · with hoked staves,
Wenten to Walsyngham · and here wenches after ;
Grete lobyes and longe · that loth were to swynke.¹

The fear of work is the principal tenet in their creed ; other dogmas are of little import to them ; they have rid their brains and heart of all such useless beliefs. They bear little resemblance to the real hermits of old, who were saints, who ate only once a day, and lived “whilom in wodes, with beres and lyones,” and were miraculously fed by birds.²

Langland, with all his doubts, has many simple beliefs, and the “Golden Legend” of the Bishop of Genoa, James of Voragine, inspires him with absolute faith. One particular story in the legend he has now in his mind. Such naïve tales abound in the good bishop’s work : for, “simple as a Christian nursed on the legend of Assisi, James believed in the familiar intercourse of wild beasts with holy men ; in the wolf that conducted Anthony to the cell of St. Paul the hermit ; in the crow that brought that day a double

¹ B. Prol. 53.

² Ac ancras ac heremytes · that eten nought but at nones . . .
That woned whilom in wodes · with beres and lyones . . .
And bryddes broughten to some bred · wherby thei lyveden.
(B. vi. 147 ; C. x. 196, 200.)

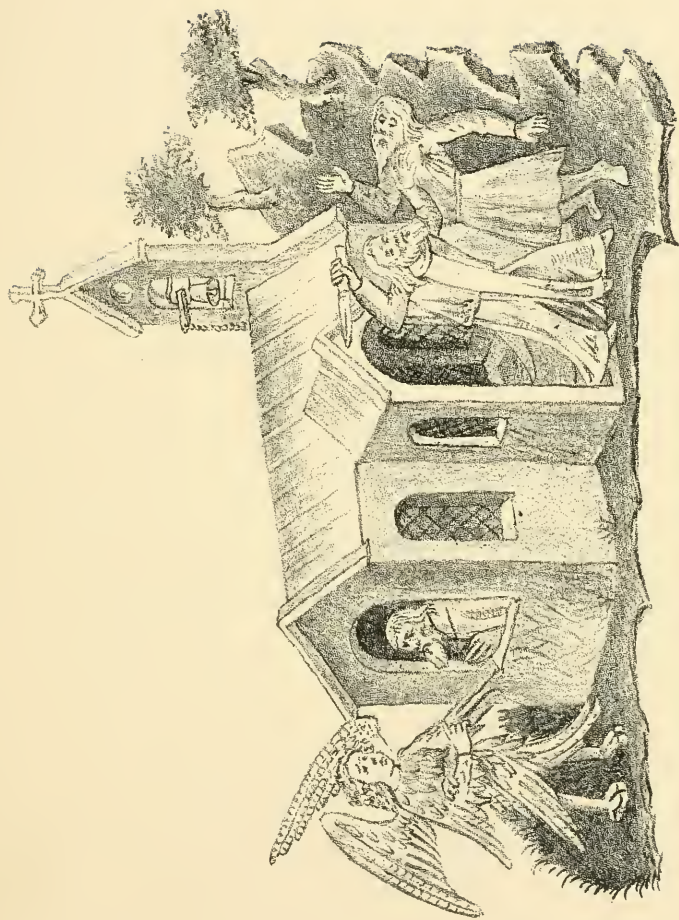
ration of fruit and bread to the two anchorets ; in the two lions who, on the evening of that very day, piously presented themselves in order to dig the grave of Paul, and when he was buried, retired again into the woods.”¹

But nowadays, says Langland, our hermits no longer wait for the birds to come ; they themselves, wise and cautious, attend with great care upon their own persons ; they are well fed and clothed ; they look as holy as can be ; they sit “at even by the hote coles,” and take a comfortable posture to warm themselves through and through ; they “unlock their legs abroad” and stretch themselves at their ease. The good man “reste hym and roste hym,” and when he has sufficiently roasted one side, now roasts the other “and his ryg (back) turn,” legs always unlocked. Which duty being performed and accomplished, he takes a drink “drue and deepe, and drawe hym thanne to bedde.” The night is spent in sweet repose ; no matin bells will wake him ; still he will wake, but he will not rise till he feels quite certain that “hym lyketh and lust.” When on his feet, he will make plans for the day, and consider

Whar he may rathest have a repast · other a rounde of bacon,
Sulver other sode mete · and som tyme bothe,
A loof other half a loof · other a lompe of chese ;
And carieth it hom to hus cote.

“Le pauvre homme !” Orgon would say. These men live “by the heye weyes,” where pass many people. Woodland solitudes have no allurements for them, neither has mass ; but eating-places have. Wherever

¹ Gebhart, “*l'Italie Mystique*,” Paris, 1893, 8vo, p. 278.



A HERMIT, TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL, KILLS HIS FATHER.

From MS. Tiberius, A. vii. (Lutgate's Translation of Deguileville's Pilgrimage).

people eat, there you are sure to meet them : “at mydday meel-tyme, ich mete with hem ofte.” Now the hermit is dressed “in a cope, as he a clerke were,”

And for the clothe that kevereth hym · cald is he a frere.

But what are they, to be so well treated ? What are they, but bondmen unwilling to work ? They have commenced by being “workmen, webbes and taillours, and carters knaves ;” what a hardship it was to work thus ! They were lean and lank, and felt tired. They had “long labour and lyte wynnynge.” But on a lucky day they discovered that it was possible to have no labour and great “wynnynge,” and noticed that good-for-nothing friars “hadde fatte chekus.” They aspired to the glory of having similar cheeks ; they did so, with no little amount of success. The change was complete : when the fellow won his “mete with treuthe,”

He sat atte sydbenche · and secounde table ;
Cam no wyn in hus wombe · thorw the weke longe,
Nother blankett in hus bed · ne white bred by-fore hym.

All is altered now that he has taken the dress of “som ordre” and looks “a prophete.” Unknown luxuries are at present familiar to him, he

Wassheth and wypeth · and with the furste sitteth.

The cause “of al thys caitifte,”

cometh of meny bisshopes,
That suffren suche sottes · and othere synnes regne . . .
For meny waker (watchful) wolves · ben broke in-to foldes ;

Thyne berkeres (barkers) ben al blynde · that bryngen forth
 thy lambren,
Dispergentur oves · thi dogge dar nat berke.¹

The pardoners scoffed at by Boccaccio and Chaucer, figure here on the same level with the false hermits; they poison the kingdom with their sham relics, with their papal bulls adorned with seals fabricated by themselves, with their impostures and lies; they drive bargains, and retail heaven to their customers. They seek for villages as yet unexplored by their kind, where numerous unatoned-for sins will bring them large sums. A minute comedy, four lines long, each trait sharpened by the cruel humorous wit of the poet, shows better than long descriptions what these people were. Piers Plowman describes to men of good will the wonderful land of Truth :

“Bi seynt Poule,” quod a pardonere · “peraventure I be
 noughte knowe there,

¹ C. x. 188 *et seq.* See Appendix, IX. The resemblance with the “Romaunt of the Rose” is here very marked. “Fals-Semblant” *loq.* :

I love noon hermitage more ;
 Alle desertes and holtes (woods) hore
 And grete wodes everichon,
 I let hem to the Baptist John.
 I quethe hym quyte, and hym relese
 Of Egipt alle the wildirnesse ;
 To ferre were all my mansiouns
 Fro citees and goode tounes.
 My paleis and myn hous make I,
 There men may renne ynne openly,
 And sey that I the world forsake. (l. 6987.)

I will go fecche my box with my brevettes · and a bulle with
bisshopes lettres ! ”

“ By Cryst,” quod a comune womman · “ thi companye will
I folwe,

Thow shalt sey I am thi sustre ·—I ne wot where they bicomē.”¹

What has become of their intended companions ?
Pardoner and “ comune ” woman turn round : Piers
and his troop have vanished.

All have not Piers’s wisdom. It is exceedingly
tempting to buy one’s way out of purgatory with
money, especially when one has a good deal of it and
no longer knows what to do with it, being at the point
of death. Rich people rarely fail to act thus. Let
them beware ; when the dreadful hour comes, if they
exhibit “ a poke-ful of pardon ” and letters of “ fra-
ternete ” and “ indulgences double-folde,” little will they
gain by that, if Dowel does not help them. Mind this,

. . . Ye maistres · mayres and jugges,
That han the welthe of this worlde · and for wyse men ben
holden,

To purchase yow pardoun · and the popis bulles.

At the dredful dome · whan dede shullen rise,

And comen alle bifor Cryst · acountis to yelde . . .

A poke-ful of pardoun there · ne provinciales lettres,

Theigh ye be founde in the fraternete · of alle the foure ordres,

And have indulgences double-folde · but if Dowel yow help,

I sette yowre patentis and yowre pardounz · at onc ples he! ²

¹ B. v. 648.

² *I.e.*, at nought. B. vii. 184. For more particulars concerning
pardoners, see “ English Wayfaring Life,” iii. 2. They were
suppressed only in the XVIth century by the twenty-first session
of the Council of Trent, July 16, 1562, considering that “*de
eorum emendatione nulla spes amplius relicta videatur.*”

✠ The friars, being more numerous, more insinuating, and of a higher origin, are even more dangerous. The holiness of their founder serves as a passport. "Charite" once lived among them, but this happened long ago, in the day of St. Francis :

And in a freres frokke · he was yfounde ones,
Ac it is ferre agoo · in seynt Fraunceys tyme.¹

Now they are everywhere welcome, and having degenerated from their ancient virtues, they act as a dissolvent wherever they penetrate, they disorganise the hierarchy and divide the flock. They laugh at the bishops, curates, and all the religious body. While the powers of the secular priests are limited to their own parish, those of the friars are universal. The friars go everywhere, confessing, begging, pocketing, growing fat.² They preach communism to the poor ; they have followed, and now they spread, the teaching of Envy :

Envye herd this · and heet (bade) freres go to scole,
And lerne logyk and lawe · and eke contemplacioun,
And preche men of Plato · and preve it by Seneca
That alle thinges under hevene · oughte to ben in comune.
And yit he lyeth, as I leve · that to the lewed so precheth,
For God made to men a lawe · and Moyses it taughte,

*Non concupisces rem proximi tui.*³

¹ B. xv. 225.

² B. Prol. 58 ; xi. 64, 76 ; xiii. 6, &c. Similar complaints in Wyclif: Good people must confess to their parish priest, not to friars ("Select English Works," vol. ii. p. 374); cloisters and churches are raised by friars "as hit were castels" (vol. iii. p. 380); they become confessors of lords and ladies, seek for invitations at their table, and neglect the poor (vol. iii. p. 396, &c.).

³ B. xx. 271. They receive Antichrist (B. xx. 57); it must be

Founded to give an example of disinterestedness and poverty, they become rich and proud; they greatly differ from those early followers of Christ who, according to the "*Romaunt of the Rose*" and to the *Visions of Langland*, "neither bilden tour ne halle;"¹ they cause their patrons to bear witness publicly to their merits, "to witnesse," said Jean de Meun, who expressed on this question the same ideas as our visionary,

our bounté,
So that man weneth, that may us see,
That all vertu in us be.
And al-wey pore we us feyne;
But how-so that we begge or pleyne,
We ben the folk, withoute lesyng,
That alle thing have without havyng.²

They strive to make life easy for the great; "pleasaunt was his absolucioun," says Chaucer of his friar; they make it especially pleasant to people of high rank; they are "chief to shryve lordes," observes Langland, and here again his description resembles, on several

acknowledged, however, that everybody does the same, monks and all; the monks ring their bells in his honour:

Freres folwed that fende · for he gaf hem copes,
And religiouse reverenced hym · and rongen here belles,
And al the covent forth cam · to welcome that tyraunt. (*Ibid.*)

¹ "*Romaunt*," l. 6573.

² *Ibid.*, l. 6960; again, l. 6969:

I dele with no wight, but he
Have gold and tresour gret plenté,

Compare the complaints of Langland,

. . . how that freris folwed · folke that was riche,
And folke that was pore · at litel prys thei sette.

(B. xiii. 7.)

points, the picture in the "Romaunt of the Rose."
 "Where fyndest thou," Jean de Meun wrote,

a swynker of labour
 Have me unto his confessour ?
 But emperresses and duchesses,
 Thise queenes and eke countesses,
 Thise abbessis and eke bygyns,
 These grete ladyes palasyns (palatial),
 These joly knightis and baillyves,
 Thise nonnes and thise burgeis wyves,
 That riche ben and eke plesyng,
 And thise maidens welfaryng,
 Wher-so they clad or naked be,
 Uncounceiled goth ther noon fro me . . .
 And make hem trowe, bothe meest and leest
 Hir paroche prest nyst but a beest.¹

A sight it is, and worth seeing, the scene between Langland's friar and the beautiful Lady Meed, that good-natured maid, of handsome appearance, who makes herself all things to all men, and gives and receives whatever you please. No one pays attention to the virtuous women who bestow all their care and time on the poor. Lady Meed does good, as she does everything else, in an elegant manner, and she is rewarded in the same way. No need for her to ask that her name be inscribed on the walls of the church ; it will be found there without her asking ; we shall see it graven on the flagstones, sculptured on the pillars, blazoned on the stained glass of the windows ; wherever she goes, she finds herself at home ; the first place is ready for her ; she sits all glittering and spreads herself out ; however dense the crowd, there is elbow room for her ; she looks

¹ "Romaunt," line 6859.

happy, there is a light around her, a heaven under her feet. Certain sins seem charming to her ; she says so, good-naturedly, with such a pleasant smile that the sins themselves appear good-natured sins. She will not forsake them ; why should she ? she has the choice, and chooses rather to repaint the church. A most proper device ! the chorus of friars say ; it is as well as could be wished. Sure is thy soul “hevene to have.”¹



THE CONFESSION OF LADY MEED.

(From a MS. in the Bodleian Library.)

The tiles give way, the stones disjoin, God's temple is threatened with ruin, a ruin that Lady Meed will not repair. Woe ! cries Langland, woe to the ungodly, to miscreants, to evildoers ! but woe, also, to the foolish, to the superficial, to all those who fail to do good, and who think to purchase for their own benefit the merits of others ; woe to the sellers and to the buyers ! Nothing, NOTHING, can compensate for neglect of duty, no stained glass, no money, no pardons. True women

¹ B. iii. 35. See Appendix, IV.

of pure lives do not behold their names on the walls of churches ; it is graven in a worthier place, in the hearts of the poor, who will one day raise their hands in supplication to heaven and pour out prayers, which will assuredly be heard.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ART AND AIM OF LAGLAND.

I.

ALL Langland's art and all his teaching can be summed up in one word : sincerity. He speaks, as he thinks, impetuously, recking little of the consequences of his words either for himself or for others ; they flow in a burning stream, and could no more be checked than the lava of Vesuvius. At moments the crater seems extinguished, and the rumblings of the tempest subside to a murmur. But storm and calm are both beyond human control ; Langland's violence and gentleness depend on internal forces over which he has no power ; a sort of dual personality exists in him ; he is the victim, not the master, of his thought ; and his thought is so completely a separate entity, with wishes opposed to his desires, that it appears to him in the solitude of Malvern ; and the melody of lines heard not long ago, recurs to our memory :

Je marchais un jour à pas lents
Dans un bois, sur une bruyère ;

Au pied d'un arbre vint s'asseoir
 Un jeune homme vêtu de noir
 Qui me ressemblait comme un frère. . . .

Partout où, sans cesse altéré
 De la soif d'un monde ignoré,
 J'ai suivi l'ombre de mes songes ;
 Partout où, sans avoir vécu,
 J'ai revu ce que j'avais vu,
 La face humaine et ses mensonges. . . .

Partout où j'ai voulu dormir . . .
 Sur ma route est venu s'asseoir
 Un malheureux vêtu de noir
 Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.¹

Filled with a similar feeling, the wandering dreamer had met, five hundred years before, in a "wilde wilderness and bi a wode-syde," a "moche man," who looked "lyke to himself"—qui lui ressemblait comme un frère—who knew him, and called him by his real name :

And thus I went wide-where · walkynge myne one (alone),
 By a wilde wilderness · and bi a wode-syde . . .
 And under a lynde uppon a launde · lened I a stounde. . . .
 A moche man, as me thoughte · and lyke to my-selve
 Come and called me · by my kynde name.
 "What artow," quod I tho (then) · "that thow my name
 knowest ?"
 "That thow wost wel," quod he · "and no wyghte bettere."
 "Wote I what thow art ?" · "Thought," seyde he thanne,
 I have suwed (followed) the this sevene yere · sey thou me no
 rather (sooner) ?" ²

"Thought" reigns supreme, and does with Langland what he chooses. Langland is unconscious of what he

¹ Musset, "La Nuit de Décembre."

² B. viii. 62.

is led to : his visions are for him real ones ; he tells them as they rise before him ; he is scarcely aware that he invents ; he stares at the sight and wonders as much as we do ; he can change nothing ; his personages are beyond his reach. There is therefore nothing prepared, artistically arranged, or skilfully contrived, in his poem. The deliberate hand of the man of the craft is nowhere to be seen. He obtains artistic effects, but without seeking for them ; he never selects or co-ordinates. He is suddenly led, and leads us, from one subject to another, without any better transition than an "and thanne" or a "with that."¹ And "thanne" we are carried a hundred miles away, among entirely different beings, and frequently we hear no more of the first ones. Or sometimes even, the first re-appear, but they are no longer the same ; Piers Plowman personifies now the honest man of the people, now the Pope, now Christ. Dowel, Dobet and Dobest have two or three different meanings. The art of transitions, as we have seen, is as much dispensed with in his poem as at the opera : a whistle of the scene-shifter, an "and thanne" of the poet—the palace of heaven fades away, and we find ourselves in a smoky tavern in Cornhill.

Clouds pass over the sky, and sometimes sweep by the earth ; their thickness varies, they take every shape : now they are soft, indolent mists, lingering in mountain hollows, that will rise towards noon, laden with the scent of flowering lindens ; now they are storm-clouds, threatening destruction and rolling with thunder ; night

¹ "Thanne come there a kyng. . . . With that ran there a route of ratones. . . . And thanne come Pees in-to parlement . . .," &c. B. Prol. 112, 145 ; iv. 47.

comes on, and suddenly the blackness is rent by so glaring a light, that the plain assumes for an instant the hues of mid-day ; then the darkness falls again, deeper than before.

The poet moves among realities and abstractions, and sometimes the first dissolve in fogs, while the second condense into human beings, tangible and solid. On the Malvern hills, the mists are so fine, it is impossible to say : here they begin and here they end ; it is the same in the Visions.

In the world of ethics, as among the realities of actual life, Langland excels in summing up in one sudden memorable flash the whole doctrine contained in the nebulous sermons of his abstract preachers. He then attains to the highest degree of eloquence, without striving after it. In another writer, the thing would have been premeditated, and the result of his skill and cunning ; here the effect is as unexpected for the author as for the reader. He so little pretends to such felicities of speech, that he never leaves us on the grand impressions thus produced ; he utilises them, he is careful to make the best of the occasion ; it seems as if he had conjured the lightning from the clouds unawares, and he thinks it his duty to turn it to use. The flash had unveiled the uppermost summits of the realm of thought, and there will remain in our hands a flickering rushlight that will, at most, help us upstairs.

Piers Plowman comes back from Rome, where he too has gone on a pilgrimage. When those who take such journeys return home, they have a bagful of indulgences and holy relics ; some are destined for their friends, there are enough for everybody ; pleasant

gifts and souvenirs, scraps of heaven are brought back from Rome. Piers, have you not brought back indulgences? Why take so much trouble if you come home empty-handed? Piers, show us your pardons; the mere sight of them will do us good; share with us these marvellous wares:

“Pers,” quod a prest tho · “thi pardon must I reden,
For I wol construe uch a clause · and knowen hit in Englisch.”

And Pers at his preyere · the pardon unfoldeth,
And I bi-hynden hem bothe · bi-hcold al the bulle.
In two lines hit lay · and not a lettre more,
And was i-written riht thus · in witnesse of treuthe :

Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam ;

Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.

“Peter,” quod the preost tho · “I con no pardoun fynde . . .”¹

“Those who do well shall go into everlasting life.” These few words, that are like a flash of light, unassailable words, drawn from the purest doctrine, sum up all Langland’s theories on life, and all the sermons of his preachers. Indulgences are condemned; more than that, they are condemned by preterition, without being so much as named, and, with them, all that was then the great evil of the soul: the love of “Fals-Semblant,” of easy redemption, of bargains and transactions (pay, and I absolve thee), and the belief in a paradise that can be won by proxy.

To these words, whose weight will be felt, if we remember the importance religion then had in life, succeeds a practical discussion between Piers and the priest, that Langland would surely have left unwritten, had his mind been in the slightest degree preoccupied

¹ A. viii. 90.

by artistic aims. He inserted it in his first text, and repeated it in his second. Late in life it seems to have occurred to him that the poem would be improved by the suppression of those lines; they disappear accordingly in text C; but they are cut off so clumsily that a visible gap is left behind; now that they have been suppressed, they are wanted:

The preest *thus* and Perkyn ' of the pardon jangled.¹

"Thus" is left to stand out there as a sign-post, to remind us that here was, in former times, a practicable road, leading to somewhere: the reverse of what a born artist would have done.

Langland follows no rule, no literary guide, no precedent. He has passed his life in dreaming and observing; he has followed his thoughts with the attention of a psychologist, and he has observed around him all that lives and moves, from crowned kings to birds on the trees and worms on the ground. He tells what he has seen and nothing else; his sole guide is the light that shines over the tower where "Truth" is imprisoned.

This light serves him in the material as well as the moral world; it illumines the road during a mystic journey through the Ten Commandments, one of those numerous Pilgrim-Progresses incessantly re-begun in the poem; and it also clears the darkness of the London lanes, where, under the pent-roof of their shops, the merchants make Gyle, disguised as an apprentice, sell their adulterated wares; it brightens the hovel in Cornhill where the poet lodges his emaciated body; it throws its

¹ C. x. 292.

rays on the scared faces of sinners for whom the hour of punishment has rung. We have here a whole gallery of portraits, which stand out in an extraordinary manner, people whose every attitude betray the ruling vice, personified abstractions as living as the characters of *La Bruyère*; and in truth, this canto of the poem contains nothing but a description of the "*Caractères et Mœurs de ce Siècle*," the "*siècle*" of Edward III.

The courtier, vain and boastful, laughs aloud at his slightest sallies, for untaught people must know he is wittier and wiser than another. He is proud of his fine clothes and of his superb oaths ("*meny bolde othes*)," of his person and of his grace on foot, on horseback, and even in bed. He has seen marvels and performed wonders. Ask this man here, or that lady there; they will tell you what I did, what I endured, what I saw, what I sometime possessed, what I know, "and what kyn ich kam of!"¹

¹ Lauhyng al a-loude · for lewede men sholde
 Wene that ich were witty · and wyser than a-nothere. . . .
 Bostyng and braggyng · wyth meny bolde othes . . .
 And strengest up-on stede · and styvest under gurdell,
 And lovelokest to loken on · and lykyngest a bedde. . . .
 Of werkes that ich wel dude · wittnesse ich take,
 And sygge to suche · that sytten me by-syde,
 Lo, yf ye leyve me nouht · other that ye wene ich lye,
 Aske of hym other of hure · and they conne yow telle
 What ich soffrede and seih · and som tyme hadde,
 And what ich knew and couthe · and what kyn ich kam of.

C. vii. 23, 34, 43, 53. Cf. *La Bruyère*: "N * * * arrive avec grand bruit: il écarte le monde, se fait faire place; il gratte, il heurte presque; il se nomme: on respire et il n'entre qu'avec la foule. . . . Un homme de cour, qui n'a pas un assez beau nom doit l'ensevelir sous un meilleur. . . . dire en

The envious man, who lives alone, "lyke a luther dogge," is wrinkled as a leek that has lain long in the sun :

And as a leke hadde yleyen · longe in the sonne,
So loked he with lene chekes.

He dwells among the burghers of London, in the City, where the struggle for riches and for the pleasures of life was already keen.¹

The old debauchee denies himself nothing :

As wel fastyngdaies as Frydaies · and heye-feste evenes,
As luf (leaf) in lente as oute of lente · alle tymes liche . . .
Til we myghte no more ; · thanne hadde we murye tales
Of . . . paramours.

toute rencontre : ma race, ma branche, mon nom et mes armes.
. . . Un Pamphile est plein de lui même, ne se perd pas de vue,
ne sort point de l'idée de sa grandeur, de ses alliances, de sa
charge, de sa dignité. . . ." ("Les Caractères et Mœurs de
ce Siècle," chap. viii. and ix.).

¹ Envy with hevy herte · asked after schrifte,
And carefullich *mea culpa* · he caused to shewe.
He was as pale as a pelet (stone ball) · in the palsye he semed,
And clothed in a caurimaury (rough clout) · I couthe it
noughte discreve ;
In kirtel (under-jacket) and kourteby (short cloak), · and a
knyf bi his syde,
Of a freres frokke · were the foresleves.
And as a leke hadde yleye · longe in the sonne,
So loked he with lene chekes · lourynge (frowning) foule. . . .
"I wolde ben yshryve," quod this schrewe · "and (if) I for
shame durst. . . .
Awey fro the auter (altar) thanne · turue I myn eyghen,
And biholde how Eleyne · hath a newe cote ;
I wisse thanne it were myne · and al the webbe after. . . .
And thus I live lovelees · lyke a luther (wicked) dogge."

(B. v. 76 *et seq.*)

All his life long, he had a taste for the very *risqué* fabliaux and tales in vogue at that time, "murye tales," "sotiledé songes," "lecherous tales," and had "lykyng to lauhe" at such stories. Now that he is "old and hor," this is his last pleasure, and he continues "lykyng tales of paramours." But he will forsake the same and all carnal delights; and forswear wine and "drynke bote with the douke" (the ducks).¹

The Miser, whose cheeks hang down like a leathern purse ("as a letherene pors lollid hus chekus"),² has much to tell concerning the manner in which fortunes are made at the great fairs of Weyhill and Winchester, whose fame was European; or in the back shops of the City, or on the markets of Bruges. He has learnt usury from Jews and Lombards, and lends money at high interest to all lords and knights who offer good securities. Poor men, sometimes, must needs borrow:

"Hastow pite on pore men · that mote nedes borwe?"

"I have as moche pite of pore men · as pedlere hath of cattes,
That wolde kille hem, yf he cacche hem myghte · for coveitise
of here skynnes."³

But here is Gloton going to shrive himself, and trudging along to church. It is Friday, and he is fasting; he passes before the door of Betone (Beatrice) the "brew-wif," who gives him good-day and asks where he is going:

"To holy churche," quath he · "for to hure masse;
And sitthen sitte and be yshriven · and synwe namore."
"Ich have good ale, godsyb · Gloton, wolt thou assaye?"

¹ C. vii. 174.

² C. vii. 199.

³ B. v. 257.

“What havest thou,” quath he · “eny hote spices?”
 “Ich have piper and pionys · and a pound of garlik,
 A ferthyng-worth of fynkelsede · for fastinge-daies.”
 Thenne goth Gloton yn · and grete othes after.¹

There sat on the bench Cecil the laundress, with Wat the gamekeeper and his wife, both drunk; Tim the tinker and two of his knaves, Hick the hackneyman, Hugh the needler, Clarice of Cocklane (a street of ill-



SIRE GLOTON.

(From the misericord of a stall at Malvern.)

fame), the clerk of the church, Sir Piers of Priedieu (a priest), and Peronelle of Flanders, a hayward, a hermit, the hangman of Tyburn, Dawe the dykeman, and a dozen idlers, porters, cut-purses, teeth-drawers, rebeck-players, rat-catchers, street-sweepers, rope-makers, in addition to Rose the “disshere,” Godfrey the garlic-monger, Griffin the Welshman, and “heps” of others: all settled there since early morn, and ready to welcome Gloton.

¹ C. vii. 355. See Appendix, VI.

An immense tavern, as we see. Langland has the eyes of "Ymagynatyf"; his tavern holds all the men and women he has met at the ale-house during his whole life; just as his plain of Malvern was wide enough to contain all mankind. Under the smoky rafters, along the blackened tables, to the noise of tankards and cups, sit the drinkers, made thirsty by words and by pæony seeds; they drink and drink again; shouts of laughter, blows, cries of "let go the coppe!" resound "til evensong rang." Screams, oaths, odours rise, all of them "trop horribles," as the Commons would have said. Escape who can! but every one cannot. Gloton, set with difficulty on his legs, is unable to stand. A staff is brought him, and he staggers along, taking one step sideways, and one backwards, as a trained dog, "lyke a glemannes bycche." At last he reaches the door of his house; but his eyes are dim, he stumbles on the threshold and falls to earth; Clement, the cobbler, catches him up by the waist and tries to lay him on his knees. . . . Let us hastily leave the group. . . . With all the trouble in the world, his wife and his daughter bear him to bed, and this "excesse" is followed by complete rest; he sleeps Saturday and Sunday till sunset; he wakes pale and thirsty, and his first words are: "Who holds the bowl?"¹

¹ Some of the traits in this picture are to be found again in Gower's much shorter description:

Thus ofte he is to bedde brought
But where he lith yet wot he nought,
Till he arise upon the morwe,
And then he saith: O, which a sorwe

We see that Langland does not always keep company with mere abstractions. Many other personages might be singled out from his gallery of portraits, but these specimens will doubtless suffice to give an idea of the realistic vigour with which he painted and put on the stage the "*Caractères et mœurs*" of that far-off century.

II.

The poet's language is, if one may use the expression, like himself, absolutely sincere. Chaucer, with his great literary experience and good sense, wished that words were used which were in closest relation to things :

The wordes must be cosyn to the dede.

Thanks to Langland's passionate sincerity, the same close relationship is established between his thoughts and his words. His thoughts are suited to his feelings, and his words to his thoughts. He is sincere in all things ; he seeks neither to deceive nor dazzle ; he never wishes to screen a weak thought by a forcible expression. The many quotations given above have already allowed the reader to perceive this ; and examples might be multiplied without number. While, in the mystic parts of his Visions, Langland uses

It is for to be drinkeles,
So that half drunke, in such a rees (passion),
With drie mouth he sterte him up,
And saith : how, Baillez ça the cuppe !

"*Confessio Amantis*," ed. Pauli, London, 1857, vol. iii. bk. vi. Gower wrote after Langland had composed his texts A and B.

a superabundance of fluid and abstract terms, that look like morning mists and float along with his thoughts, his style becomes suddenly sharp, nervous, sinewy, when he comes back to earth and moves in the world of realities. Let some sudden emotion fill his soul, and he will rise again, not in the mist this time, but in the rays of the sun ; he will soar aloft, and we shall wonder at the grandeur of his eloquence. Some of his simplest expressions are real *trouvailles* ; he penetrates into the innermost recesses of our hearts, and then goes on his way, and leaves us pondering and thoughtful, filled with awe. What two-hours sermon is worth this simple line : Christ became man,

And baptised and bishoped (confirmed) · with the blode of his herte.¹

Some of his apostrophes, not a few of his rough but energetic sketches, recall the more perfect examples of the poetic art of a later date ; more than once uncouth Langland reminds us of noble Milton :

Avenge, o God, thy slaughtered saints ! . . .

. . . Pore peple, thi prisoners · lorde, in the put of myschief,
 Conforte tho creatures · that moche care suffren
 Thorw derth, thorw drouth · alle her dayes here,
 Wo in wynter tymes · for wantyng of clothes,
 And in somer tyme selde · soupen to the fulle ;
 Comforte thi careful · Cryste, in thi ryche ! (kingdom)²

If he wants floating words to follow close upon his mystic thoughts, he uses realistic terms, noisy, ill-favoured expressions, when clouds have dispersed, and

¹ B xv. 545.

² B. xiv. 174. Milton, Sonnet xviii.

he sits at table with Gloton. Whatever be his subject, he will forge a word, or distort a meaning, or cram into an idiom more meaning than grammar, custom, or dictionary allow, rather than leave a gap between word and thought ; both must be fused together and made one. To give us an impression of the splendid tall-roofed hostels which merchants built for themselves in London with their ill-gotten gains, Langland does not stop in the street to make a sketch and description, but merely says in one word : if they had been honest, they would not “ timber ” so high.¹ Saracens and Jews ought to be taught ; the root of our faith is in them ; they had “ a lippe of owre byleve.”² Many of his short sayings, burning with enthusiasm, take hold of the reader’s mind and will not be easily forgotten. Some of his sketches are doubtless scarcely visible now on the paper ; still, when once seen, they live in the memory. The picture in three words representing Piers as being Truth’s “ pilgryme atte plow ”³ is as grand and simple as a drawing by Millet, and the three words might indeed have served as a motto for both.

His vocabulary of words is the normal vocabulary of the period, the same nearly as Chaucer’s. The poet of the “ Canterbury Tales ” has been often reproached with having used his all-powerful influence to obtain rights of citizenship in England for French words. But the accusation does not stand good. Chaucer wrote in the language of his time, such as it was ; he never tried to alter it, or to make it more French ; he was very far from the pedantry of which examples have been seen in several countries at a more recent

¹ A. iii. 76. ² B. xv. 493. ³ B. vi. 104. *Supra*, p. 119.

date ; attempts to latinise the French tongue, at the Renaissance ; or to make English more Saxon, in our day. Langland's works may serve as a proof of this. He did not write for the court, and was in no way concerned with the fashions and elegances of his time. However, the admixture of French words is not less considerable in his poem than in the works of his illustrious contemporary. The visionary spoke, without the slightest affectation, the language used by everybody ; but everybody's language was permeated as was the genius itself of the new-formed race, with French elements.

His poem offers a combination of several dialects.¹ Forms are found in his Visions, derived from a variety of regions in England, and this may be taken as pointing to sojourns made by the poet in other places besides Malvern and London. Northern, western, southern forms meet in the poem, and, in many cases, the discrepancy must needs be attributed to the author himself, not to copyists. One dialect, however, predominates, that is, the Midland dialect ; Chaucer used the East Midland, which is nearly the same, and was destined to prevail and become the English language.

✧ An increase in the use of western words and forms has been noticed in the last or C version of the text : we must see in this a proof of Langland having probably returned to the Malvern region, during the last years of his life. ✧

Langland did not accept any of the metres used by

¹ On the dialect of Langland, see, besides Skeat : "William Langleys Buch von Peter dem Pflüger," by Richard Kron, Göttingen, 1885, 8vo, pp. 85 *et seq.*

Chaucer; he preferred to remain in closer contact with the Germanic past of his kin, and stuck to alliteration. The main ornament of French verse, namely rhyme, had been vulgarised in England, owing to the Norman conquest; Chaucer wrote in rhyming lines, though he found their rules difficult. The scarcity of rhymes in the English language was for him a source of trouble, "a grete penaunce," and he envied the facilities afforded by the French tongue:

And eke to me hit is a grete penaunce,
 Syth ryme in Englissh hath such skarseté,
 To folowe worde by worde the curiosité
 Of Graunsoun, floure of hem that make in Fraunce.¹

Chaucer, however, wavered not in his allegiance to the prosody of "Fraunce," which had become, by this time, the prosody of the greatest number in England too. He did not like alliteration, and sneered at it:

I can not geste, run, ram, ruf, by letter.²

Alliteration was the main ornament of the verses composed by the Germanic, and Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon poets. It consisted in the use of a certain number of accented syllables beginning with the same letter. This metre had survived the Conquest, but in a more or less broken state; many poets used it clumsily, mingling the rules of the two prosodies. So did, for example, Layamon, whose "Brut" offers, at the beginning of the XIIIth century, a strange mixture of

¹ Last lines of the "Complaynt of Mars and Venus."

² "Prologue of the Persone."

rhyme and alliteration. Some authors, however, had a greater respect for the older system, and wrote, according to fixed rules, poems, the fame of which has survived. Among them stand foremost, in the XIVth century, "Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight,"¹ and, above all, the Visions of Langland.

Langland wrote in long lines, divided into half-lines by a pause, usually marked by a particular sign in manuscripts (and by a raised full stop in printed editions). Each line contains strong, that is strongly accented, syllables, in fixed or nearly fixed number, and weak, that is unaccented or slightly accented, syllables, in varying number. The rules according to which these elements are combined in Langland's verse have been summed up as follows by Mr. Skeat :

"Each half-line contains two or more strong syllables, two being the original and normal number. More than two are often found in the first half-line, but less frequently in the second.

"The initial-letters which are common to two or more of these strong syllables being called the *rhyme-letters*, each line should have two rhyme-letters in the first and one in the second half. The two former are called *sub-letters*, the latter *chief-letter*.

"The chief-letter should begin the former of the two strong syllables in the second half-line. If the line contain only two rhyme-letters, it is because one of the sub-letters is dispensed with.

"If the chief-letter be a consonant, the sub-letters should be the same consonant, or a consonant expressing the same sound. If a vowel, it is sufficient that the

¹ Ed. R. Morris, Early English Text Society, 1864, 8vo.

sub-letters be also vowels ; they need not be the same, and in practice are generally different. If the chief-letter be a combination of consonants, such as *sp*, *ch*, *str*, and the like, the sub-letters frequently present the same combination, although the recurrence of the first letter only would be sufficient.”¹

These rules are not very difficult, and it must be added, besides, that the poet handles them in a way which renders them even more easy. Sometimes he allows himself to begin a weak syllable with a rhyme-letter ; at other places he uses two rhyme-letters in the second half-line, and one only in the first. Take, for example, the first four lines of the poem :

In a sómer sésón · whan sóft was the sónnē
I shópe me in shroudes · as I a shépe wérē,
In hábite as an béremite · unholý of wórkēs
Went wýde in this wórlde · wóndres to hére.

Two only among those four lines are absolutely regular ; the first has four rhyme-letters instead of three ; the fourth is similarly constructed, and, besides, the first of the rhyme-letters begins a weak syllable.

The alliterative prosody, of which Langland's Visions are the most important specimen in England, survived till the XVIth century. The taste for the tinklings and tollings of such verses was deep-rooted in the race ; and recurring sounds were long used, without rules, and merely for the sake of the noise ; they are to be found in most unexpected places. There had been examples of them even in the Latin hexameters of

¹ Oxford edition, vol. ii. p. lix.

English poets of the XIIth century ; they abound in Joseph of Exeter :

Audit et audet
Dux falli : fatisque favet cum fata recuset.
.
.
.
.
.
.
Ardet et audet
Promissorque ingens, facilis præsagia prædæ
Ducit amor.
.
.
.
.
.
.
Postquam Helenes Paridi patuit præsentia, classem
Deserit.¹

In this shape, it may be said that alliteration never died out ; it came down to our times, and there is frequent use of it in Byron :

Our bay
Receives that prow which proudly spurns the spray.
How gloriously her gallant course she goes !
Her white wings flying—never from her foes.
.
.
.
.
.
.
Or fallen too low to fear a further fall.
.
.
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.
.
.
Of flight from foes with whom I could not cope.²

Langland's erudition is such as might be expected from one who described himself as anxious to know, but "loth for to stodie." He has visibly read much, but hastily and without method ; he has read at random, and never taken the trouble to classify and ticket what he remembered. Except when it is a question of the Scriptures, which were for him the subject of constant meditations, he quotes at random ;

¹ "De Bello Trojano," bk. iii. ll. 108, 241, 223.

² "Corsair."

his Scriptural quotations even are not always quite accurate. He thinks he remembers this or that author has said something in support of a favourite theory of his; he therefore names the author, and refers us, without chapter or verse, to Ovid, Aristotle and Plato; and it would be very bad luck indeed, if one or the other, in some work or other, had not said, in some manner, something to the purpose. Most of his references are mere guesses. At a certain place, to feel perfectly secure of not standing alone and unsupported, he appeals to "Porfirie and Plato, Aristotile, Ovidius, . . . Tullius, Tholomeus," and "elevene hundred" more; a very long roll of authorities, as we see.

If the quotations from the Bible and the works of the Fathers are not always accurate, the superabundance of them, and the ease with which they recur under his pen, are proof sufficient of his having been impregnated, as it were, with religious literature. His mistakes even are, in a sense, an additional proof, as they show that he does not open his books to find out appropriate passages; he quotes from memory; his memory, however, is not absolutely trustworthy; and Ymagynatyf, as usual, plays him some very bad turns.

↳ Besides the ancients and the Bible, Langland shows a knowledge of a good many more recent authors. He is familiar with French ballads and romances, with English and Latin works, with Robin Hood and Guy of Warwick, the Seven Sleepers, the Golden Legend. He represents his London workmen singing French songs: "Dieu vous save, Dame Emme."¹ He knows the "Goliardeys . . . glotoun of wordes"² and the satirical

¹ B. Prol. 223.

² B. Prol. 139.

poems of which they were the heroes. He has read Rutebeuf's "*Voie de Paradis*," the "*Pélerinages*" of Deguileville, the "*Roman de la Rose*"; and more or less conscious reminiscences of those poems are afloat in his memory.

III.

Langland addresses men of good will, whatever be their rank or avocations; he writes for the mass of the people rather than for the small group of the exalted ones. Sincere and upright, he wants to be understood; he is never purposely obscure; his aim is never to please or astonish or dazzle connoisseurs; he seeks, simply, means to direct rays of light to obscure corners usually left in darkness. Thus he is original and worthy the attention of artists, because he is so intensely honest, not by reason of his cleverness. All his Latin quotations are translated into English, for he never loses sight of the untaught part of his audience:

"I can nought construe al this," quod Haukyn · "ye moste kenne me this on Englisch."

To Englisch-men this is to mene. . . .

If lewed men wist · what this Latyn meneth. . . .¹

And he turns "this Latyn" into English. All the better, he thinks, if he is read by the learned and the

¹ B. xiv. 276; xv. 55; xv. 116, &c.

wealthy ; but he means, before all, to be accessible to the poor and lowly, to "lewede men." He therefore shapes his thoughts into the form that will better appeal to this sort of men ; proverbs and proverbial sayings abound in his works ; most numerous, too, are practical counsels for everyday life, given in the half serious, half humorous tone which the wisdom of nations usually affects.

A catechism of memorable sayings, and a collection of curious mottoes, might easily be made out of his Visions. Let Common Sense "be wardeyne, yowre welthe to kepe." "Measure is medcyne." Faith without deeds is "as ded as a dore-tre." Chastity without charity "is as lewed as a laumpe that no lighte is inne." "The Comune ys the kynges tresour." Trust in God and in his mercy ; wicked deeds

Fareth as a fonk (spark) of fuyr · that ful a-myde Temese
(Thames).

I tell you, rich, it cannot possibly be, that you should

Have hevene in yowre here-beyng · and hevene her-after.

Selden moseth (becomes mossy) the marbelston · that men ofte
treden.¹

Some of the people Langland produces on his stage are "as wroth as the wynd—as comune as the cart-wey—as hende (courteous) as hounde is in kychyne," &c.²

¹ B. i. 35, 55, 184 ; C. vi. 182, vii. 333 ; B. xiv. 140 ; A. x. 101.

² C. iv. 486, 168 ; B. v. 261. Cf. Gower : "Comun plus qe la halte voie." "Ballade" xliii.

Langland is a true Englishman, as truly English as Chaucer; even more so. One important characteristic is wanting in Chaucer: he is not insular; there is an admixture of French and Italian ideas in his mind; at bottom, no doubt, he is mainly English, but still, there is something of a cosmopolitan tinge about him. Continental "makers" acknowledged him as a brother; "Fraunces Petrark, the laureat poet," told him, it seems, when they met near "Padowe," the tale of patient Grisilde; Des Champs praised him for having "planté le rosier" on British ground. Not so with Langland, who is nothing if not insular; he may even be said to be the typical insular; and one of the first on record. He is not a brother poet for continental poets; he will not be praised by Des Champs. Other countries are nothing to him but with reference to his own. His views accord very well with this most important period in the history of England, when the nation, growing conscious of its own individuality, becomes decidedly averse to over-extension, does not want the Pyrenees for its frontier, nor a French town for its capital; but seeks, on the contrary, whatever its leaders and kings may aspire to, to gather itself up, to concentrate its forces, to become a strong, well-defined, powerful body, and cease to be a large and loose invertebrate thing. Only when this gathering up shall have been successfully accomplished, will the nation lend itself readily to a policy of expansion. This second phase was not to be seen by Langland, for it took place only in Elizabeth's reign. The Hundred Years war was a royal, not a national, war; the movement for expansion did not assume a

national character before the XVIth century. English *kings* fought against France; the English *nation* peopled the shores of America. Our visionary thoroughly belongs to his day and country; he is afraid lest England should be drawn into a policy of adventures; he wants peace with France; he rejoices, as we have seen, when he hears that Edward has consented

To leve that lordschupe · for a luitel selver.¹

This is, according to Langland, one of the best things Edward did; he followed in this the advice of Conscience. When the question is of peace, Langland is always ready to cry with the Commons: "Oïl! oïl!" Yes, yes. He wants the nation to spend its energies at home, and not to be disturbed from this noblest of tasks, the improvement of the machinery of the State, and the establishment of a more perfect balance of power between King and Parliament.

This equilibrium was to be, and Langland longed for it. Constitutional ideas had not, in the whole field of English literature, during the XIVth century, a better representative than Langland; it may almost be said that they had no other. We have noticed how closely he identified himself with the Commons of England, wanting what they wanted, hating what they hated. There is almost no remonstrance in the Rolls of Parliament that is not to be found also in the Visions. The same reforms are advocated, the same abuses denounced. The Commons are, like the poet, intensely insular; but, insular as they show themselves to be, they offer a most happy combination of the Norman

¹ A. iii. 200. *Supra*, p. 35.

and Saxon genius. They have sometimes the boundless audacities of mystic dreamers, whom nothing stops, because they build in the air. But this same impossible dream, doomed, it would seem, to vanish like smoke, this dream is appropriated, transformed, made useful and practical, by the Norman Mind that is on the watch in the "chambre depeinte" at Westminster; and the shadow becomes reality. Thus has worked for centuries, to the great profit of the nation, the dual genius inherited from remote ancestors. The Saxon dreams his dream and sings his song; the Norman listens and says: Why not? be it so! To pass from the absolute monarchy of the early Plantagenets, to a limited monarchy in which the main source of power will be vested in the Commons: what an exorbitant dream, fit only for the wanderer resting his limbs by the shade of the Malvern linden trees! A few generations come and go, and fancy becomes truth; the thing is there, realised, and the poet goes to Westminster, and states in his verses that there it is. It took other nations four hundred years more to reach the same goal.

Another important characteristic increased the hold of Langland over his contemporaries and the men who came after; namely, his unconquerable aversion for all that is mere appearance and show, self-interested imposture; for all that is antagonistic to conscience, abnegation, sincerity. Such is the great and fundamental indignation that is in him; all the others are derived from this one. For, while his mind was impressed with the idea of the seriousness of life, he happened to live when the mediæval period was

drawing to its close ; and, as usually happens towards the end of epochs, people no longer took in earnest any of the faiths and feelings which had supplied foregoing generations with their strength and motive power. He saw with his own eyes knights prepare for war as if it were a hunt ;¹ learned men consider the mysteries of religion as fit subjects to exercise one's mind in after-dinner discussions ; the chief guardians of the flock busy themselves with their "owelles" only to shear, not to feed, them. Meed was everywhere triumphant ; her misdeeds had been vainly denounced ; her reign had come ; under the features of Alice Perrers she was now the paramour of the king !²

At all such, men and things, Langland thunders anathema. Lack of sincerity, all the shapes and sorts of "faux semblants," fill him with inextinguishable

¹ Wars in France : "Et avoech ce, li rois (Edward III.) avoit bien pour lui trente fauconniers à cheval, cargiés de oisiaus et bien soixante couplez de fors chiens et otant de lévriers dont il aloit cescun jour en cace ou en rivièrre ensi qu'il lui plaisoit. Et si y avoit pluseurs des signeurs et des riches hommes qui avoient leurs chiens et leurs oiziaus ossi bien comme li rois leurs sires." Froissart, "Chroniques," Luce, bk. i. ch. 83.

² "Milites parlamentales graviter conquesti sunt de quadam, Alicia Pereres nominata, fœmina procacissima, quæ nimis familiaris extiterat Domino regi Edwardo. Hanc utique accusabant de malis plurimis, per eam et fautores ejus factis in regno. Illa etenim modum mulierum nimis est supergressa ; sui etenim sexus et fragilitatis immemor, nunc juxta Justiciarios regis residendo, nunc in foro ecclesiastico juxta doctores se collocando, pro defensione causarum suadere ac etiam contra jura postulare, minime verebatur." Walsingham, "Historia Anglicana," A.D. 1376 (Rolls), vol. i. p. 320. A first draft of a similar picture had been drawn beforehand by Langland in his portrait of Lady Meed (A. ii. *et seq.*)

hatred. In shams and "faux semblants," he sees the true source of good and evil, the touchstone of right and wrong, the main difference between the worthy and the unworthy. He constantly recurs to the subject by means of his preachings, epigrams, portraits, caricatures; he manages to bring forward anew, to magnify and multiply, his precepts and his curses, so as to increase our impression of the danger and number of the adherents to "Fals-Semblant." By such means, he hopes, we shall at last hate those whom he hates. Endlessly therefore, in time and out of time, among the mists, across the streets, under the porches of the church, to the drowsy chant of his orations, to the whistle of his satires, ever and ever again, he conjures up before our eyes the hideous grinning face of "Fals-Semblant" the insincere. Fals-Semblant is never named by name; he assumes all names and shapes;¹

¹ Compare the description in the "Romaunt of the Rose," where "Fals-Semblant" appears, of course, under his proper name, and thus describes his own transformations:

. . . Protheus that cowde hym chaunge,
 In every shape homely and straunge,
 Cowde nevere sich gile ne tresoune
 As I; for I come never in toun
 There as I myghte knowen be,
 Though men me bothe myght here and see. . . .
 Now am I knyght, now chasteleyne;
 Now prelat, and now chapeleyne . . .
 Now am I maister, now scolere,
 Now monke, now chanoun, now baily. . . .
 Somme tyme am I hore and olde;
 Now am I yonge, stoute and bolde;
 Now am I Robert, now Robyn;
 Now frere menour, now jacobyn;

he is the king who reigns contrary to conscience, the knight perverted by Lady Meed, the heartless man of law, the merchant without honesty, the friar, the pardoner, the hermit, who conceal under the garment of saints, hearts that will rank them with the accursed ones. Fals-Semblant is the pope who sells benefices, the histrion, the tumbler, the juggler, the adept of the vagrant race, who goes about telling tales and helping his listeners to forget the seriousness of life. From the unworthy pope, down to the lying juggler, all these men are the same man. Deceit stands before us; God's vengeance be upon him! Whenever and wherever Langland detects Fals-Semblant, he loses control over himself; anger blinds him; it seems as if he were confronted by Antichrist.

No need to say whether he is then master of his words and able to measure them. With him, in such cases, no *nuances* or extenuations are admissible; you are with or against Fals-Semblant; there is no middle way; a compromise is a treason; and is there anything worse than a traitor? And thus he is led to sum up his judgment in such lines as this:

He is worse than Judas that giveth a japer silver.¹

If we allege that there may be some shade of exaggeration in such a sentence, he will shrug his

And with me folwith my loteby (paramour) . . .
 Somtyme a wommans cloth take I;
 Now am I a mayde, now lady . . .
 Somtyme am I a prioresse,
 And now a nonne and now abbesse. . . . (l. 6322.)

¹ B. ix. 90.

shoulders. The doubt is not possible, he thinks, and his plain statement is self-evident.

No compromise! Travel through life without bending; go forward in a straight line between the high walls of duty. Perform your own obligations; do not perform the obligations of others. To do over-zealously your duty, to take upon you the duty of others, would trouble the State; you approach, in so doing, the borderland of Imposture. The knight will fight for his country, and must not lose his time in fasting and in scourging himself. A fasting knight is a bad knight.

Many joys are allowed. They are included, as a bed of flowers, between the high walls of duty; love flowers even grow there, to be plucked, under the blue sky. But take care not to be tempted by that wonderful female Proteus, Lady Meed, the great corruptress. She disappears and reappears, and she too assumes all shapes; she is everywhere at the same time; it seems as if the asp of Eden had become the immense reptile that circles the earth. Meed is the more dangerous because she is at times legitimate reward, and at times odious bribery; and as she always comes with her same bewitching, beautiful face, it is sometimes difficult to know which Meed stands near, beckoning us. Langland therefore uses all the means in his power to put the faithful adherents of the Plowman on their guard. Were Meed ever bribery, the danger would be immensely lessened; but she is often Compromise; and with Compromise heads become giddy; the abyss opens wide and near. Piers Plowman undertakes to do duty as a guide; a

salary would be both welcome and legitimate ; but he refuses, fearing Lady Meed.¹

All the aversions of Langland are fused into this one ; and a grand and splendid thing it is to contemplate the outbursts of such a fiery hatred against the most trifling extenuations of truth. He does not spare himself ; his want of abnegation draws from him bitter tears. Kneeling on the stone flags, he cries mercy to his other self that tortures him ; his long frame is shaken by sobs.

This hatred is immense ; but stands alone in the heart of the poet ; to all the rest he is comparatively merciful. It is a strange but certain fact that, with all his indignation, he is at bottom an optimist. His mind, no doubt, is traversed by melancholy thoughts, as was the mind of the Saxon ancestor ; the idea of death and the charnel-house weighs upon him :

For in charnel atte chirche · cherles ben yvel to knowe,
Or a knyghte fram a knave there · knowe this in thin herte.²

Such were the Saxon anxieties, and such was also the peculiar sadness which, pervading the works of Villon, has secured for him a place apart in the literature of old France. He, too, thought of the charnel-house and stared at the skulls thrown together there :

Et ycelles qui s'inclinaient
Une contre autres en leurs vies,

¹ "Nay, by the peril of my soule" · Peers gan swere,
"Ich nolde fonge a ferthing · for seynt Thomas shryne !
Were it told to Treuthe · that ich toke mede,
He wolde louye me the lasse · a longe tyme after."

(C. viii. 200.)

² B. vi. 50.

Desquelles les unes régnaient
 Des autres craintes et servies,
 Là les vois toutes assouvies
 Ensemble, en un tas, pêle-mêle . . .¹

But, in truth, when the gusts of the tempest have ceased,—and no violent tempest lasts very long,—Langland shows himself an optimist. Death even appears to him sometimes with a sweet face, death,

The which unknitteth al kare * and comsynge is of reste.²

He does not believe that humanity is doomed to total and final perdition. He does not despair of future, not even of present times. Men will perhaps be converted, and become better, and act better. They are not so wicked, and their organisation so monstrous, that society must be upset and rebuilt again. Actual arrangements must be improved, not destroyed. He leaves untouched, ecclesiastical hierarchy, dogma, the division of classes; but, above all, he shudders at the mere idea that any damage might be sustained by that holy and peerless institution, that palladium of liberty and progress: the Parliament and Commons of England.

He goes about, preaching disinterestedness, abnegation, austere virtues; but there is often, at the same time, kindness in his voice; comfort is derived from the very sound of his words. A feeling of sympathy for the suffering ones warms the whole work; he is visibly one with them; his sternest precepts are softened by the tone in which they are delivered. There is something pathetic, and tragic also, in his having to acknowledge that there is no cure for many evils, and

¹ "Le Grand Testament," CL.

² B. xviii. 213.

that, for the present, resignation only can soothe the pain. With a throbbing heart he shows the unhappy and the lowly, who will die before having seen the better days that are to come, the only talisman that may help them: a scroll with the words, "Thy will be done!":

But I loked what lyflode (means of life) it was · that Pacience
so preysed,
And thanne was it a pece of the *pater noster* · "*Fiat voluntas tua.*"¹

Piers the Plowman is the ideal of the poet; but Langland is not blind to the possible merits of the rich and the powerful. Charity sometimes lives among them, as among the poor:

For I have seyne hym in sylke · and somme tyme in russet.²

He is a strict adherent to dogmas, and to the traditional teaching of the Church; but the idea of so many Saracens and Jews, doomed wholesale to everlasting pain, is repellent to him; he can scarcely accept it; he hopes they will be all converted and "turne in-to the trewe feithe"; for "Cryste cleped us alle . . . Sarasenes and scismatikes . . . and Jewes."³

The truth is, that there was a tender heart under the rough and rugged exterior of the impassioned, indignant, suffering poet. Much of what has been pointed out before leads to such a conclusion; and

¹ B. xiv. 47.

² B. xv. 214.

³ B. xiii. 209; xi. 114. To be compared to the observations of the Good Parliament concerning the "aliens" having benefices in England: "Si est Seint Esglise plus destruyt par tielx malveiz Cristiens que par touz les Jewes et Saracyns du monde" ("Rotuli Parliamentorum," vol. ii. p. 338).

if an additional proof were wanted, it would be found in the motto adopted by him, which shows, better than all the rest, what were his aims in life : *Disce, Doce, Dilige*. In these words will be found the true interpretation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest : Learn, Teach, Love :

Thus taughte me ones
A lemman that I loved · Love was hir name.¹

What is then to be learnt above all things in this life?

“Conseille me, Kynde (nature),” quod I · “what crafte is best to lerne?”

“Lerne to love,” quod Kynde · and leve of alle othre.”²

¹ B. xiii. 138.

² B. xx. 206.

CHAPTER VII.

LANGLAND'S FAME—HIS PLACE IN MYSTIC LITERATURE.

I.

WHILE their author continued to live obscure and unknown, the Visions, as soon as written, were circulated, and acquired considerable popularity throughout England. In spite of the time that has elapsed, and numberless destructions, there still remain forty-five manuscripts of the poem, more or less complete; ¹ and this figure is the more remarkable when we consider that, contrary to works written in Latin or in French, Langland's book was not copied and preserved outside his own country. One of these manuscripts was possibly written or corrected by the author himself.²

¹ See, concerning each of them, the indications supplied by Mr. Skeat, Oxford ed., vol. ii. p. 61. Cf. Richard Kron, "William Langleys Buch von Peter dem Pflüger, Untersuchungen das Handschriftenverhältniss und dem Dialekt," Goettingen, 1885, 8vo.

² MS. Laud, Misc. 581, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. "I believe there is no reason why it may not be the author's autograph copy. Wherever a slight mistake is left in the text, there is a mark at the side to call attention to it." Skeat, Oxford ed., vol. ii. p. lxviii., containing text B.

in a comely cōson. Whan goft was the come
 I chope me in schouder. as I a chope were
 In habite as an heremyte, mykelt of woordes
 Went wyde in my woordes. Wondes to hope
 He on a way morning. on malique hilles
 we byfel a fey. of fany me thourte
 I was wey forbandred. and went me to repte
 Under a blode banke. bi a bornes orde
 And as I lay and tened. and loked in pe watres
 I stombred in a slepyng. it elynged so me ye.

The poem did not tempt the hand of the clever illuminators of the period. The serious and practical character of the work was so evident that it was always transcribed to be read, and not looked at; scribes copied it, as it had been written, for the benefit of the simple and sincere, for men of good will. This is why it comes before us, like the author himself, "robed in russett."¹

"Piers Plowman" soon became a sign and a symbol, a sort of pass-word, a personification of the labouring classes, of the honest and courageous workman; while "the mayde Mede," "Meed and Falseheed," also became famous, and were duly held in extreme contempt.² In his "Canterbury Tales," amid all his aristocratic, joyous, or grimacing figures, Chaucer introduces a labourer who appears nearly related to ours, and who leads, with the utmost nobility of heart, a life both active and holy:

A trewe swynker and a good was hee,
Lyvyng in pees and perfight charitee. . . .
He wolde threisshe, and therto dyke and delve,
For Cristes sake, with every pore wight,
Withouten huyre, if it laye in his might.³

The name of Piers figured as an attraction on the title of numerous treatises; ⁴ there existed, as early as

¹ Very rough drawings, of which specimens have been given, pp. 33 and 151, adorn, however, the MS. Douce 104 in the Bodleian Library; and the MS. R. 3. 14, in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, has the frontispiece, reproduced above, p. 119.

² Wright, "Political Poems," vol. ii. p. 238.

³ Prologue of the "Canterbury Tales," written about 1386; "Piers Plowman" was then already famous.

⁴ A series of such treatises is enumerated by Mr. Skeat, London ed., vol. iv. pp. 864 *et seq.* "The Praier and Complaynte of the

the XIVth century, "Creeds" of Piers Plowman, "Complaints" of the Plowman, &c.¹ Piers' credit was made use of at the time of the Reformation, and in his name were demanded the suppression of abuses, and the transformation of the old order of things. He even appeared occasionally on the stage :

Piers.

I beseech your Grace
To pity my distress. There is an unknown thief
That robs the commonwealth. . . .
The time hath been, my lord, *in diebus illis*,
That the ploughman's coat was of good home-spun russet
cloth. . . .

King.

Alas, poor Piers, I have heard my father say
That Piers Plowman was one of the best members in a
commonwealth.²

Sometimes Piers was entrusted with missions of which Langland would never have approved. At an early date, the meaning of the poem had been distorted by many, each being moved thereunto by the necessities

Plowman unto Christe," 1531, in prose ; "Pyers Plowmans Exortation unto the Lordes, Knightes, and Burgoyses of the Parlyament House" (time of Edward VI.) ; "A goodlye Dialogue and Dysputacion between Pyers Ploweman and a popish preest," 1548 (?), &c.

¹ "Pierce the Ploughman's Crede," written in alliterative lines in 1394 or thereabout, edited by Mr. Skeat, Early English Text Society, 1867, 8vo. "The Plowman's Tale, or the Complaint of the Plowman," written about 1395, sometimes, but wrongly, attributed to Chaucer ; edited by Wright, "Political Poems" ("Rolls").

² "A merry Knack to know a Knave," 1594, in Dodsley's "Old Plays," Hazlitt's edition, vol. vi., 1874, p. 560.

of his cause. All the dissatisfied, all the protesters and reformers forcibly pulled the Plowman by his cloak, or seized it to place it on their own shoulders. Nothing proves more clearly than this the renown and authority of the Visions.

¶ Langland was still living when, in direct opposition to his ideas, the name of his hero became a sort of watchword in the great uprising of the peasantry in 1381. An English letter, written at this time, in mysterious terms, by the priest John Ball, to the rebels of the county of Essex, has been preserved; it contains allusions to Piers Plowman, to Dowel and Dobet, and runs thus:

“John Schep, som tyme Seynt Marie prest of Yorke and nowe of Colchestre, greteth well Johan Nameles, and Johan Cartere, and biddeth hem that thei ware of gyle in borugh, and stondeth togiddir in Goddis name, and biddeth Peres Ploughman go to his werke, and chastise welle Hobbe the robber, and taketh with you Johan Trewman and alle his felaws, and no mo [and loke shappe ¹ you to on heued and no mo].

Johan the muller has ygrounde smal, smal, smal. . . .
Be ware or ye be wo,
Knoweth your frende fro youre foo . . .
And do welle and bettre, and fleth synne.”²

The task assigned by Langland to his Plowman was

¹ The printed text has *sharpe*, a mistake pointed out by Mr. E. Maunde Thompson; the meaning being: Look you group yourselves under one chief only.

² “Miserat insuper ductoribus communibus in Estsexia quamdam litteram ænigmatibus plenam ad hortandum eos ut incepta perficerent quæ exposit inventa est in manica cujusdam suspendendi

not, by any means, the one John Ball hoped to see him accomplish, and the words Dowel and Dobet assumed quite another signification, issuing from the pen of the rebellious priest, than the "Disce, dosce, dilige" of the poet.

The adoption of the name of the Plowman as symbolic of the rising came doubtless from the fact that, on some points, Langland had expressed opinions in accord with the feelings of the malcontents. He had been, for example, very hard upon the men of law, whom the peasants hated above all others. John Ball recommended his followers to destroy: 1st. "Majores regni dominos"; 2nd. "Juridicos, justiciarios et juratores patriæ."¹ Walsingham states that this last hatred was so keen that it was dangerous to be seen with an inkstand.²

As time passes, erroneous interpretations of the poem multiply. "Bilious Bale," in the XVIth century, makes out our author to be a Wyclifite, and a forerunner of the Protestants; ³ Thomas Fuller, in the following century, speaks of him as the "Morning Star" of the Reformation, belonging "rather to the day than to the night." In spite of the manuscripts of the Plowman being unadorned with beautiful miniatures, their value was nevertheless appreciated, and they figure, as early

pro turbatione præfata, cujus tenor talis est . . . 'John Schep,' &c. . . . Hanc litteram idem Johannes Balle confessus est scripsisse." Walsingham, "Historia Anglicana," vol. ii. p. 33 ("Rolls").

¹ "Chronicon Angliæ" ("Rolls"), p. 321.

² "Periculosum erat agnosci pro clerico, sed multo periculosius si ad latus alicujus atramentarium inventum fuisset." "Historia Anglicana" ("Rolls"), vol. ii. p. 19.

³ See above, Chapter III. p. 60.

as the XVth century, in wills, as objects deserving of mention, and fit to constitute separate legacies. One's heirs were left : "Unum librum Anglicanum de Pers Plughman"—"librum vocatum Piers Plowman."¹

Lydgate, Gawain Douglas, Skelton, all were acquainted with the poem, and make allusions to it. Bishop Ridley, later, complains that people of the new school have modernised old English authors : "Petrum Aratorem, Gowerum et Chaucerum, et similis farinæ homines."² Under Elizabeth, all the literary critics mention the Plowman; he is spoken of by William Webbe, Puttenham, Meres; the latter, enumerating the English satirists, begins with Piers Plowman. "As Horace, Lucilius . . . are the best for satire among the Latins, so with us, in the same faculty, these are chief : Piers Plowman, . . ." &c.³ Gascoigne, in his poem the "Steel Glas," gives a portrait of the Plowman very similar to Langland's picture :

Stand forth, good *Peerce*, thou plowman by thy name,
 . . . stand forth *Peerce* plowman first,
 Thou winst the roome, by verie worthinesse. . . .
 Disdaine him not : for shal I tel you what ?
 Such clime to heaven, before the shaven crownes.
 . . . For they feed, with frutes of their gret paines
 Both king and knight, and priests in cloyster pent.⁴

¹ Wills of the years 1431 and 1433; Skeat, London ed., vol. iv. p. 864.

² About 1555; Skeat, *ibid.*, p. 866.

³ "Paladis Tamia," registered 1598, Arber's "English Garner," 1879, vol. ii. p. 100.

⁴ "The Steel Glas," written 1576, Arber's reprint, London, 1868, p. 78.

Drayton paraphrases part of the last canto ; Milton is familiar with the Visions, and quotes them in his quarrel with Hall, as a proof that his adversary is not the earliest English satirist. In the XVIIIth century Bishop Percy writes an essay, in his "*Reliques of Ancient Poetry*," on the metre of the poem ; Tyrwhitt identifies several of the allusions ; Warton, in his "*History of English Poetry*," devotes a whole section to Langland.

The Visions were first printed in 1550 by Robert Crowley, not without success, for they had three editions the same year ; a fourth edition was published by Owen Rogers in 1561. There was no other edition until our century. Then appeared those of Whitaker, in 1813 ; of Thomas Wright, in 1842, reprinted in 1856 ; and lastly, the excellent editions of Mr. Skeat (London, 1867-84, 4 vols., and Oxford, 1886, 2 vols.), being without comparison the grandest monument raised to the memory of the Visionary.

II.

The problem of this life and the next, the contradictions and obscurities of which formed the subject of endless meditations for Langland, was studied with passion in the same century throughout the nations of civilised Europe. The subject being identical, the resemblances are numerous between the mystic authors of the different countries, but we should not conclude, owing to those resemblances, that they did nothing but copy each other. Langland, in particular, is one of the most original writers of the group.

†Doubtless, the frame as well as the subject offers, in many cases, singular analogies; the poet almost invariably treats of a dream and a journey, he falls asleep as in the "Romaunt of the Rose," and travels towards Truth or Dowel, or the Celestial City, as Bunyan's Pilgrim did many years after. In giving to their work the shape of a dream, the mystics conformed to the custom of the time; and in describing a journey undertaken by their heroes, to a quasi-necessity imposed by the subject itself, there was no need for them to copy their predecessors. †

Thus it happens that similarities might be pointed out, without there being the least attempt at imitation, between Langland and Dante. The Italian, like the English poet, lived, so to speak, wrapped in his visions, absorbed in them, passing years in dreaming and writing them, and accomplishing his awful pilgrimage through the nine circles of hell, and the nine zones of the expiatory mount, until he arrived in Paradise. He, too, meets the Seven Deadly Sins; he wakes, and sleeps again, he dreams new dreams; he sees a mystical representation of the events of the Gospel. He judges Papacy with the same severity as Langland will later; he, too, curses the temporal power of the Pope; the triumphal car of the Church is, in his eyes, transformed to the Beast of the Apocalypse. Both accept the legend according to which Trajan was saved; both refuse to admit that the great men of antiquity are indiscriminately cast into hell. Dante places them—Socrates, Plato, and even "hawk-eyed" Cæsar—in his first circle, which resembles Limbo; Langland protests against the idea of Aristotle being damned.¹ "You

¹ "Inferno" iv.; "Piers Plowman," B. x. 383.

vainly search in the 'Inferno' for the place where the souls of irregular Christians suffer ; I mean those who have neglected their devotional or sacramental duties, and failed to accomplish the good works prescribed by the Church." ¹ Likewise, in the English poem, Trajan is saved, though a "Sarasene" ; "Syngyng of masses," telling of beads had nothing to do with it, nor "preyere of a pope" ; he was saved because of his "lyvyng in treuthe." Such is his own account of his fate :

. . . "Wyth-outen any bede-byddyng . . .
 And I saved, as ye may se · with-oute syngyng of masses ;
 By love and by lernynge · of my lyvyng in treuthe,
 Broughte me fro bitter peyne · there no biddyng myghte."
 —Lo, ye lordes, what leute (uprightness) did · by an em-
 peroure of Rome,
 That was an uncrystene creature · as clerkes fyndeth in bokes,
 Nought thorw preyere of a pope · but for his pure treuthe
 Was that Sarasene saved.²

We are again reminded of Dante when, in the Visions, Holy-Church leads the poet who questions her and asks : Who is this one ? "What is this womman ?" may I talk to her ?

"Kenne me bi somme crafte · to knowe the Fals."
 —"Loke uppon thi left half · and lo where he standeth." . . .
 I loked on my left half · as the lady me taughte,
 And was war of a womman · wortheli yclothed . . .
 "What is this womman," quod I · "so worthily atired ?" ³

It seems as if we were hearing an echo of the dialogues between the Florentine and the Mantuan. But, in reality, the analogy of the subject and the casual similarity of

¹ Gebhart, "L'Italie mystique," 1893, p. 324.

² B. xi. 144.

³ B. ii. 4 *et seq.*

the two poets' mood are the only reasons why they appear sometimes purposely to follow the same path.

It would have been possible for Langland to become acquainted with the works of earlier mystics who had written in Latin. He does not seem to have borrowed much from them. He undoubtedly knew one of them, the most celebrated of all, St. Francis of Assisi. He not only names him, but he borrows from him, as it seems, the proverb by which the saint recommended his followers to eat whatever was offered them, were it even very good: "*Necessitas non habet legem.*"—"Nede ne hath no lawe," observes Langland, who goes on to evolve from the saying rules concerning the question of food and raiment.¹ But nothing resembles the universal benevolence and gentleness of the saint less than the bitterness and the sneers of the English poet, whose optimism is mingled with such keen hatreds.

The distance is no less great, but for another reason, between Langland and the apostle of the "Eternal Gospel," Joachim de Flora, another dreamer and lover of solitude, who had spent in his childhood "long hours in prayer, lying on a large stone in an arbour, under the shade of vine leaves," like Langland under the linden trees of Malvern. But, differing in this from the English poet, who "*cleps us alle*," Joachim, "instead of enlarging the church in order to admit all the faithful, closed the nave to the multitude, and only left space for a few saints to kneel under the lamp that burned before the altar."²

¹ B. xx. 10.

² Gebhart, "*L'Italie mystique*," pp. 64, 81. Joachim died 1202; St. Francis, 1226.

✕ Langland, like nearly all the authors of his time, borrows the idea of his dream from the "*Roman de la Rose*." He avails himself of the popularity which the "*Roman*" had secured for abstract personages. He borrows tools and brushes from the workshop of *Lorris* and *Meun*, but he uses them to paint a quite dissimilar picture ; even when he has to denounce the same abuses and to express the same ideas, there remain profound differences in tone and feeling. *Jean de Meun* will often sneer for the sake of sneering. *Langland* never does ; he would consider it monstrous. He wants to convert us ; if we feel the sharp sting of his raillery, well and good, but such is not his aim. In the company of *Jean*, if we are converted, well and good, but the poet will remain perfectly satisfied, in many cases, and very pleased, if he perceives that the cleverness of his satire has been fully enjoyed. *Guillaume de Lorris* seeks the flower of love, hard of access, and nearly impossible to grasp. The object of *Langland's* efforts is as difficult to reach, but of a different nature ; and the dreamer sadly contemplates from the summit of his hills the far-off tower where Truth is imprisoned.¹ ✕

Curious resemblances might be pointed out between *Langland* and several other French poets of the period, but the differences in tone and feeling would again be very great. In another respect, also, and a most important one, the *Visions* would be found unique : all the mediæval dreamers, be they French, Italian, or English, be they named *Lorris*, *Rutebeuf*, *Dante*, *Chaucer*, or *Gower*,

¹ See above, pp. 136, 138, 146, 149, 179, concerning the resemblances between the *Visions* and the place in the "*Romaunt of the Rose*" where "*Fals-Semblant* his sermon biganne."

are the heroes of their own visions ; they are themselves the pilgrims of their dreamt-of pilgrimages, the visitors of their Houses of Fame, the penitents of their confessions of a lover. None of them chose a hero summing up his ideal of what a man should be, and offering a telling contrast with the only too human frailties of the author himself. No poet in France took Jacques Bonhomme for the subject of mystic visions ; no other Englishman, not even Bunyan, gave to another *Plowman* the first place in his work. In this, as in the other cases before mentioned, Langland showed himself the better artist, though in reality no artist at all ; by dint merely of his sincerity and honesty, he shaped for his *Visions* a better frame than any (Dante excepted) of the dreamers of his day, with all their talent, knowledge, and manifold gifts.

Rutebeuf, in the foregoing century, had come forward as the hero of a "*Voyage de Paradis*," which offers many points of comparison with Langland (and with Bunyan too). It is a "voyage" in a dream, undertaken, as usual, in spring-time, when blue and yellow flowers begin to bloom, and the peasant resumes the tilling of his field ; the time when,

De fleurs s'enorgueillit la terre
 Et se couvre de fleurs diverses,
 De bleues, de jaunes, de perses ;
 Le prudhomme, en voyant le jour,
 Retourne travailler son champ.

The poet then starts on a most troublesome journey, in which he meets the Seven Deadly Sins, who are described all and each, Gloton being very friendly with

the tavern-keeper "Hasard." The traveller is comforted by a "prudhomme," whose name he asks : "My name is Pity, he said.—Pity? said I, what a fine name ! —Yes, it is, but my fame is small, and diminishes every day." Rutebeuf reaches, at the end, the town of Repentance, whose marvels he would be scarcely able to unfold, had he "as many tongues as he has teeth."¹

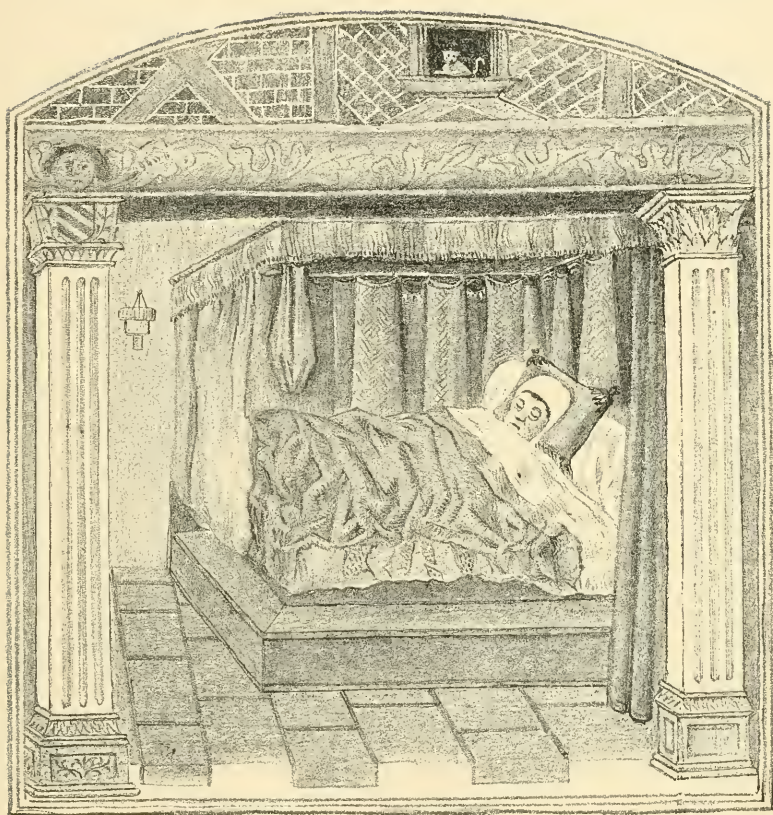
Resemblances and differences of the same sort might be discovered, in many other "Songes," or dreams, and in those "Bibles," in which were described at great length (and without the talent of a Rutebeuf), the vices "du siècle puant et horrible."² But it will be doubtless sufficient to draw attention to one more French poem, chosen for the twofold reason that it was very popular both in England and in France, and that Langland has possibly borrowed something from it.

This work was the then celebrated poem of Guillaume de Deguileville,³ who died about 1360, and who wrote, between 1330 and 1335, his "Pélerinage de la Vie humaine," followed by the "Pélerinage de l'Ame" and the "Pélerinage de Jésus Christ." Chaucer

¹ Clédat, "Rutebeuf," Paris, 1891, chap. vi. "Collection des Grands Ecrivains Français."

² Beginning of the Bible of Guyot de Provins (XIIIth century) in Barbazan and Méon, vol. ii. Guyot is as hard as Langland in his judgments on Rome : "Rome nos suce et nos englot." See also the Vision of Huon de Méri, called "Le Tournoiement de l'Antechrist," 1235, ed. Wimmer, 1888. The tone of such works, however, accords much more with Gower's poems than with Langland's Visions.

³ His surname is so spelt in an acrostic to be found in one of his poems (See MS. fr. 9196, fol. 92, in the National Library, Paris). The village from which he derived it is called to-day Digulleville.



DEGUILEVILLE, ASLEEP IN HIS BED, DREAMS OF A "PÉLERINAGE DE LA VIE HUMAINE."
MS. 22037 in the British Museum.

was well acquainted with this author, for he translated his prayer to the Virgin, or the "A. B. C." The "Pilgrimage of Human Life" was done into English several times, both in prose and verse; one of these translations was the work of Lydgate, who wrote it in 1426, at the request of Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury. There exist many manuscripts of these English versions, some of which are curiously illustrated.¹

† Monk though he was, Deguileville had read the "Roman de la Rose" in his convent. This worldly work inspired him with the idea of writing one on the same plan, but more serious: "I had read, of an evening, and pondered over, the beautiful Romaunt of the Rose. Well do I believe that this was the cause that induced me to dream the dream that I am about to unfold."² He falls asleep; a very sound sleep as appears from the accompanying picture. In his sleep he beholds a pilgrim starting on the search for the

¹ Specimens of the miniatures and large extracts from both the English and French versions of the poem (these last, however, derived from the corrupt texts printed at the time of the Renaissance) will be found in "The ancient poem of Guillaume de Guileville . . . compared with the Pilgrim's Progress of J. Bunyan," by N. Hill, London, 1858, 4to. Some of the miniatures are reproduced here, pp. 94, 134, 198, 200, 202, from MS. Cot. Tib. A. vii., containing Lydgate's translation, and MS. 22937, containing the "Pélerinage" in French.

² En veillant avoye lëu,
 Considéré et bien vëu
 Le biaux Roumans de la Rose.
 Bien croÿ que ce fu la chose
 Qui plus m'esmut à ce songier
 Que ci après vous vueil nontier.

P. Paris, "Manuscrits Français," vol. iii. p. 242.

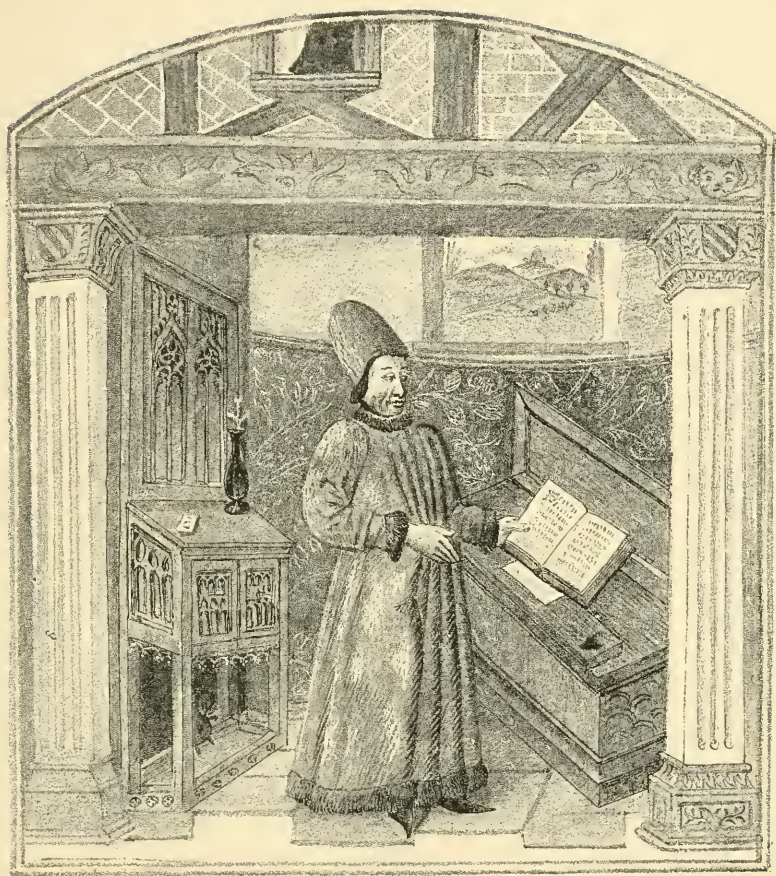
Celestial City, assisted on his journey by Grace-of-God. On the way, the pilgrim meets several of those personified abstractions which figure also in Langland's poem : Penitence, Charity, Nature, Gluttony, Avarice, Wrath, &c. All of them, as they do in the English visionary's poem, show themselves ever ready to talk and to preach long sermons.¹ "I am," says Penitence, "the beautiful but little loved one." . . . "I," says Charity, "am the mother of all virtues, she who clothes the naked."² The comparative merits of Active and Idle Life are discussed, as they are in Langland. Active Life is represented by an honest workman who plies the most modest of crafts; he is by trade a mat-maker : "Everybody cannot be a goldsmith or a money-changer."³ Lady Oiseuse is of as charming a nature as Lady Meed. We behold her sitting on the left, playing with her hands, busy doing nothing, turning her glove this way and then that way, round her finger. She visibly cares as little as possible for spinning, sewing, or, in fact, doing any work whatever.³

¹ Je suy la belle po amée . . .
Je suy la mère des vertus,
Celle qui revest les gens nus.

MS. fr. 823, in the National Library, Paris, fol. 15 and 17.

² Chacun ne puet pas forger
Couronnes d'or ou l'or changer.
(fol. 46.)

³ A la senestre se seoit
Sur un perron et s'acoutoit (accoudait)
Une gentille damoiselle,
Qui, une main dessoubz l'aisselle,
Avoit, et [dedans] l'autre un gant
Tenoit, dont bien s'aloit jouant ;



DEGUILEVILLE DECIDES TO WRITE HIS DREAM
MS. 22937 in the British Museum.

When she happens to show some signs of activity, you may be sure it will be that she finds it is time for her to tire her hair, to bathe, and admire herself in a mirror. She reads romances, she tells stories, she, too, makes herself all things to all men. "I am," she informs the pilgrim, called "Oiseuse, the sweet, tender one; I had far rather put on my gloves, comb my hair, wash my body, than do any other sort of thing." She is busy on Sundays reading romances and vain tales; she delights in all those worthless idlers, jugglers, tumblers, japers, ballad-mongers, whom Langland never ceases to pillory in his verses. She "takes people to the greenwood to pluck violets and gather nuts." She brings them to places of delight, where songs and ballads and roundels will be heard to the accompaniment of the harps' and organs' sweet sound. They

Entour son doï le démenoit
Et le tournoit et retournoit.
A sa contenance bien vi
Que n'estoit pas de grand soussi,
Que po le challoit (se souciait) de filler,
Ne des aguilles enfiller
Ne de nul autre labour faire.

1 . . . Si suy nommée
Oiseuse la tendre sucrée,
Mieux aime mes gants enformer
Et moy pingnier et moy laver,
Moy regarder en un mirour
Que je ne fais autre labour.
Je songe festes et dymenches
Pour lire aucunes fois élenches (arguments)
Et les faire voir ressembler,
Pour raconter truffes et fables
Rommans et choses mençongables.

(Same MS., fol. 48.)

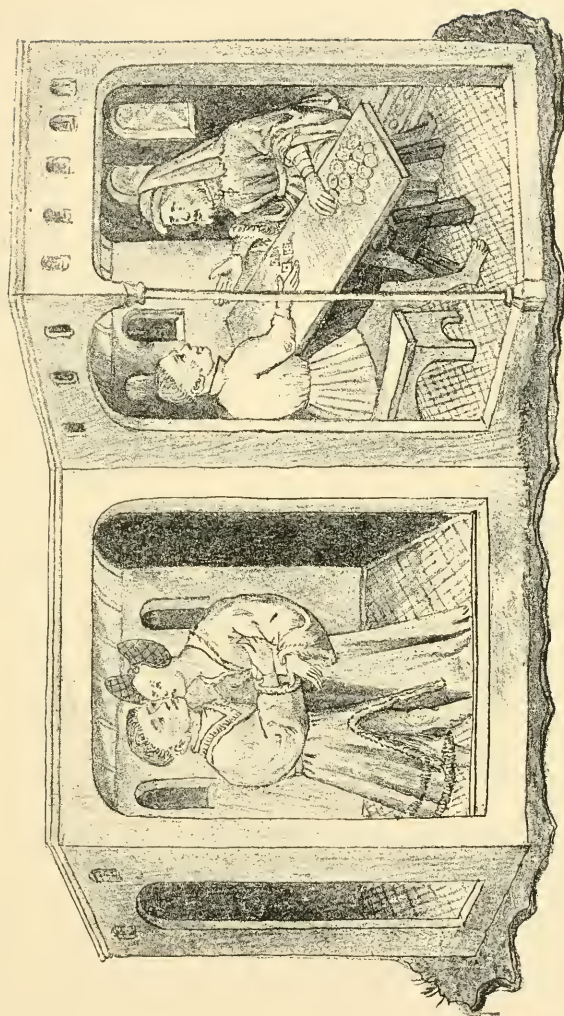
play chess and dice ; jugglers and conjurors perform their choicest tricks.¹

The pilgrim then meets Youth, Fortune and "Gladnesse of the World." Then appear, as in "Piers Plowman," the doleful images of Poverty, Infirmity, Old-Age, forerunners of Death. They stretch the pilgrim on his couch ; Prayer comes to his assistance, Death strikes him, and the poet awakes to the sound of his convent's bells.

A much greater religious enthusiasm and a stronger passion for moral reforms are displayed by the German mystics of the XIVth century ; they come very near the border of hallucinations and mental diseases ; some among their number cross the border line, and become, as Langland would have said, "frankyng of wittes." The result is, this time, resemblance of *tone* as well as subject between these mystics and Langland. But, as the language in which most of them wrote, precludes all idea of direct imitation, we can only conclude from such resemblances that Germans and English represent the same mystic movement.

¹ Je maine la gent au vert bois
 Cueillir violetes et nois,
 Je les maine aux lieux de délit
 D'esbatemens et de déduit,
 Et là leur fais oïr chançons,
 Rondiaux, balades et doulz sons
 De harpes et de simphonies
 D'orgues et d'autres sonneries ;
 Là leur fais ouïr vieleurs,
 Gieux de batiaux et de jongleurs,
 Gieux de tables et d'eschequier,
 De drinquet et de mereliers,
 De dez et d'entregecterie.
 Et de mainte autre muserie.

(Ibid., fol. 46, 48.)



DECUILEVILLE'S PILGRIM MEETS "GLADNESSE OF THE WORLD" AND PLAYS DICE.
LYDGATE'S *Translat ion*, MS. Tit. A. vii.

This movement was particularly intense in the valley of the Rhine, at Cologne and Strasbourg; and its ramifications extended into the Netherlands, Switzerland and Bavaria.

As early as the XIIth and XIIIth centuries, "beguinages" had been instituted in the Netherlands and in Germany, in which members of the laity, frequently belonging to noble and well-to-do families, united for the purpose of leading pious lives, without binding themselves by religious vows. Beguinages also existed in England. The ladies for whom the "*Ancren Riwle*" was written in the XIIIth century led the life of beguines at Tarrant-Kaines, Dorsetshire.¹ Such contemplatists were predisposed by their manner of life to ecstasies, visions, and every sort of mystical accidents. Thus it was that the sect of the "Free Spirit" found numerous adherents among them.²

The result of being so completely absorbed in the love of God, was that the adepts of the "Free Spirit" gradually became pure pantheists, and were condemned as such. In their case, at the same time, was shown how extremes meet, for their superhuman doctrine lost itself in gross observances; never had the angel and the brute been more closely united. "Man," they declared, "when he has reached the highest state of

¹ "*The Ancren Riwle*," ed. J. Morton, London, Camden Society, 1853, 4to.

² Concerning the sect of the "Free Spirit" and the way in which it spread during the XIIIth century, see W. Preger, "*Geschichte der deutschen Mystik*," Leipzig, 1874, 2 vols. 8vo, bk. ii. chap. ii. 6. A list of the heresies of the sect will be found in the appendix of vol. i. p. 461. See also Jundt, "*Histoire du Panthéisme populaire*," Paris, 1875, 8vo.

perfection, should neither fast nor pray, for his senses are then so completely dominated by reason, that he can, in all liberty, grant his body whatsoever he pleases. . . . Those who live in this state of perfection and are animated by the Spirit of God, are no longer subject to any ecclesiastical precept, for where reigns the Spirit of God, there is also liberty. To exercise one's self in the practice of virtues is the sign of an imperfect man, the perfect soul dismisses all virtues." The virtue of chastity in particular was first dismissed, and rarely recalled. "The adepts had built for themselves a subterranean place of meeting that they called Paradise. . . . They celebrated their worship there in a state of absolute nudity, thus symbolising their return to the state of innocence of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden."¹ They were fast approaching insanity.

With many of them, heretical and pantheistical propositions abounded, and, on this account, a great number of the adherents of the sect were drowned in the Rhine, burnt, or put to death by the sword.² One of their tenets was that God is "all that exists," "*Deus est formaliter omne*." In consequence, God is in all bread as well as in the bread of the Eucharist; "every honest layman can consecrate the elements." Hell there is none; after death we shall be absorbed in God.

¹ A. Jundt, "*Histoire du Panthéisme populaire*," pp. 31, 54.

² Here are some examples of their heretical propositions; they maintain "*quod homo unitus Deo peccare non possit. . . . Quod nihil sit peccatum nisi quod reputatur peccatum. . . . Quod quicquid faciunt homines, ex Dei ordinatione faciunt. . . . Oscula virorum et mulierum solutorum non esse peccatum. . . . Animam esse de substantia Dei*." W. Preger, *ibid.*, pp. 463 *et seq.*

"No one will be damned ; neither the Jews nor the Saracens, because after death their spirit will be lost in God." Eckhart, who did not, however, strictly belong to the sect, teaches that "God alone exists, and that the world has no reality in itself." According to him "the soul is absorbed in God, as the glimmerings of dawn are absorbed in the rays of the morning when the sun appears."¹

His pupil Catherine is transported into heaven ; her soul melts ; her reason melts too. "She exclaims : Rejoice with me, I have become God. Seated in the darkest corner of the church, she passes whole days in the enjoyment of feeling her soul absorbed in God ; she gives no signs of life ; . . . she finds her delight in being an object of aversion and scorn for the outer world."² This kind of happiness was familiar to Langland, who also allowed himself to be taken for a madman.

Other groups form themselves, differing in certain points, but resembling each other on the common ground of mystic enthusiasm. They possess, besides, so many theories in common, that it is often difficult to discern where one ends and the other begins. The most curious of all, owing to the similarities to Langland it offers, is that group of visionaries, prophets, and prophetesses which reckoned among its members, as early as the XIIth century, a number of saints and a number of madmen, and whose most celebrated

¹ Letter of John of Ochsensstein, in Jundt, *ibid.*, p. 52. Some of their heretical (but not pantheistical) propositions resemble Wyclif's teachings. Hence the easy success won by Wyclif's doctrines in Bohemia, where the adepts of the Free Spirit, Beghards and Adamites were at a time very numerous.

² Jundt, *ibid.*, pp. 52, 89, 93.

representative, in the XIVth century, was the Strasbourg banker, Rulman Merswin.

The members of this mystic family have, like the others, a superhuman ideal of life ; they are struck by the calamities of their time, pestilences, storms and hurricanes ; by the destruction of the town of Basel in 1356. The vengeance of God is nigh ; the mystics commune with heavenly powers and with their own souls ; they break with the world ; the world retaliates by calling them maniacs, and there is often some truth in this judgment. They indite prophecies in apocalyptic style ; they have visions and ecstasies : for most of them these visions are their real life, and this life in dream appears to them so far superior to any earthly one, that they are irresistibly impelled to write and relate their experiences. They resist from modesty, but this resistance makes them suffer, and they at last give in ; they take their pen, and under the form of poems, visions, and incoherent treatises, write a moral autobiography ; and thus feel relieved. They begin again, and add new visions to the old ones, relate their journeyings through the abstract lands of ethics ; and, in short, think and act very much like our English dreamer.

To this mystic family belong, though differing in many respects the one from the other, St. Hildegard, who died in 1178, and "first initiated the great apocalyptic movement in the Middle Ages ;"¹ St. Elizabeth of Schoenau, in the same century, who kept in Latin a sort of journal of her visions, day by day and hour by hour,

¹ "Rulman Merswin et l'Ami de Dieu de l'Oberland," by A. Jundt, Paris, 1890, 8vo, p. 6. Works in Migne's "Patrologie," vol. cxcvii.

and described the triple series of three ways leading to God.¹ Her aim is the same as Langland's, but the three ways have nothing in common with Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. In the first series, one is blue, one green, and one purple, and they signify contemplative life, active life, and martyrdom.² In the XIVth century, the beguine Matilda of Magdeburg, who writes in German, announces the speedy coming of Antichrist; her fame spreads to foreign lands, and, as a supreme honour, she figures in Dante's trilogy. She is that Matelda who leads the Florentine to the earthly paradise, pending the time when Beatrice will conduct him to the heavenly mansions.³ To the same spiritual lineage belong, among many others, Henry Suso, who died in 1366, who had visions and ecstasies, was torn by doubts, and wrote his moral autobiography; ⁴ Rulman Merswin, whose "conversion" took place in 1347; and the whole group of the "Friends of God."

¹ "Liber Visionum." F. W. Roth, "Die Visionen und Briefe der hl. Elisabeth . . . von Schönau," Brünn, 1886, 8vo.

² "Ego Elisabeth vidi in visione spiritus mei montem excelsum copioso lumine in summo illustratum, et quasi vias tres a radice ejus ad cacumen usque porrectas. Quarum una que media erat in directum mihi opposita, speciem habebat sereni celi, sive lapidis iacentini, que vero a dextris meis erat, viridis apparebat, et que a sinistris purpurea. Stabat autem in vertice montis contra viam mediam vir quidam insignis, tunica iacentina indutus. . . . Facies ejus splendida erat ut sol . . . habebat autem in ore suo gladium." "Liber viarum Dei," Roth, *ibid*, p. 88.

³ Identified by M. Preger.

⁴ Preger, *ibid.*, vol. ii. bk. ii. At the beginning of the same century lived Matilda of Hakeborn and Gertrud, whose "Revelations" have been published by the Benedictines of Solesmes: "Revelationes Gertrudianæ ac Mechtilidianæ," Paris, 1875-7, 2 vols. 8vo.

“Conversion” is another common trait in the moral biography of nearly all mystics. A voice from on high suddenly orders them to return to God, and they obey, sometimes with backslidings, which, however, are followed by spiritual reactions. This was the case with Langland and with all the English who, from century to century, fell a prey to mysticism: Rolle of Hampole, Fox the Quaker, Wesley, &c. Their “witte wex and wanyed,”¹ as Langland said of the ebb and flow of his own thoughts. Merswin, without entering a religious order, renounces the world, suffers horrible temptations, and approaches the verge of madness, exactly like Rolle of Hampole, his English contemporary. “I feared more than once,” says he himself, “to be wandering in my mind;”² he is assailed by doubts; like St. Hildegard, he wishes not to write, but is at last obliged to. Langland also wrote, because he was unable to refrain from so doing; he braved the raillery of Ymagynatyf, who assured him that there was no need in this world for one book more: “there ar bokes ynowe.”³ Merswin wrote several works in German prose, some under his own name, others attributed by him to a mysterious “Friend of God in the Oberland,” with whom he pretended to keep up a secret correspondence. After much trouble, and after medical science had come to the assistance of history, it has been recently proved that the Friend of God never existed at all, being a pure creation of Merswin’s diseased brain, an extreme example of “*dédoublement de la per-*

¹ B. xv. 3.

² Jundt, “Rulman Merswin,” *ibid.*, p. 19.

³ B. xii. 17.

sonnalité" (duplication of the personality).¹ Merswin, though he composed himself, and transcribed in a handwriting and dialect different from his own, the treatises which he gave out as being the work of the Friend of God, believed in his creation, as madmen believe in their dreams. The Friend of God is his Piers Plowman; only his morbidness far exceeds Langland's.²

Views and propositions closely resembling those of the English visionary abound in Merswin's work, and are the result of a similar state of mind and of like anxieties. Many of them are to be found in his "History of my Conversion," in the "Book of the Three Stages of Spiritual Life," the subject of which is the "beginning, growth and ultimate end of mystic life," bearing some analogy to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. The history of "Two Youths of Fifteen" recommends "a golden mean between luxury and austerity." In the "Spiritual Stairway," a wide garden is described; "this garden is the world"; laymen and

¹ The non-existence of the "Friend of God" has been placed beyond doubt by Father Denifle. The sincere belief Merswin had, however, in this invention of his fancy, has been proved in the most ingenious manner by Jundt, *ibid.*, pp. 93 *et seq.*

² Many among these mystics fell, owing to their own practices, and especially by an excessive use of "abnegation," into now well-known diseases of the will. "Abnegation" is recommended by one of them, as follows:—"Hæc autem propriæ voluntatis abnegatio sive resignatio . . . hominem sine electionem hujus aut illius in agendo aut omittendo ad Dei honorem juxta superiorum voluntatem, omniumque bonorum hominum quibuscum vivit consilium, cum vera discretionem vivere facit" ("D. Joannis Rusbroechii . . . Opera omnia," Cologne, 1562, fol.; "De præcipibus quibusdam virtutibus Libellus," chap. iii.). Ruysbroek lived in the XIVth century.

monks meet in this "feir feld ful of folk," as Langland would have termed it. The hero of the "Master's Book" is a mystic preacher, so torn by doubt that "his brain becomes diseased"; he is "exposed to the scorn of his friends." In the "Book of the Nine Rocks" are depicted the woes and vices of the time: "Open thy eyes, and see how the popes live nowadays," bishops, too, with their wars and intrigues, clerks, confessors, they of the easy penance and pleasant absolution, nuns, secular clerks fond of good meals, kings, burghers, merchants, craftsmen, and peasants. Jews and Saracens are judged as leniently as they are by Langland; both stand a chance of being saved.

Such are the ideas propagated throughout the countries where the German language is spoken, by the converted banker Rulman Merswin, from the "Green Island" cloister, outside Strasbourg, where he had retired.¹ The "Book of the Nine Rocks," says his principal commentator, "may justly be called the mystic apocalypse of the XIVth century." It may, or rather might be, had we not the Visions of Piers Plowman.

¹ Particulars about Merswin, the text of several of his treatises, and facsimiles of his handwriting, when he writes in his own person as well as when he takes pen for the Friend of God, will be found in: Jundt, "Rulman Merswin," 1890; "Les Amis de Dieu au XIV^e Siècle," Paris, 1879, 8vo; Ch. Schmidt, "Précis de l'histoire de l'Église d'occident pendant le moyen âge," Paris, 1885, 8vo, pp. 302 *et seq.*; W. Preger, "Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter," Leipzig, 1874. The works attributed to the Friend of God of the Oberland have been published by Schmidt under the (mistaken) title, "Nicolaus von Basel Leben und ausgewählte Schriften," Vienna, 1886.

III.

In spite of these resemblances, so long as the contrary has not been established by material proof, we must hold that there was between Langland and Merswin a similitude of aim, and up to a certain point of manner too, but no direct imitation. Common ties existed between them, which arose from the parity of their mystic tastes. Others might be found, were we to revert to the distant origin of races, in the time when the Valkyrias crossed the sky of the Germans and Saxons, and when warriors of both nations met in their common paradise, the Valhalla of Odin.

Certain it is that, if resemblances can be traced between Langland and several authors belonging to the Latin races, they are infinitely closer and more numerous with the Spiritualists of Germanic origin. In the latter case, analogies stand unchecked, and unaccompanied with those strong and irreducible differences which strike the reader when he considers southern mystics. We find, for instance, no trace in Langland of those classic sympathies with which Dante's writings are impregnated. Never, assuredly, would it occur to our visionary that when approaching the threshold of God's paradise, the thing to say is : "Apollo ! now that the hour has come for the last of my tasks, fill me with the breath of thy inspiration. Up to this, the help of the Muses of Parnassus has been sufficient ; thine now I must have. . . . Come into my breast, and may I feel conscious of thy presence as Marsyas did, when thou drewest his body from the sheath that covered it !"¹

¹ "Paradiso," canto i.

And on the other hand, nothing in the French contemporaries of Langland equals the passion and ceaseless fever by which his thoughts are animated, and sometimes inflamed, and sometimes obscured.

Closer resemblances, and no such glaring discrepancies, are to be found in Germanic or Anglo-Saxon literature, or in the succession of mystics, continued in England, from century to century, up to our time.

The christianised Anglo-Saxons retained, during nearly the whole period previous to the Norman Conquest, the impetuosity and enthusiasm of their pagan ancestors; they suffered from the same fits of depression and despair; then followed periods of "aboulie" (absent volition), during which they fell an easy prey to any enemy who chanced to attack them. They celebrate the glory of Christ's apostles with the same fiery spirit with which they formerly sang the deeds of Odin. They excel in depicting sombre and desolate scenes; they are haunted by the thought of death, the charnel-house and the tortures of hell. They enjoy the recurrence, at intervals in the midst of their long, sluggish reveries, of short, sharp sayings which, appearing suddenly, illuminate the darkness for a second, like a flash of lightning. Such sayings are found in their poems, in their didactic treatises, in their sermons, and in everything that bears the stamp of their particular genius.

From time to time after the Conquest, minds are formed in the island, either apart from or in opposition to the world, which seem to have been cast in the Saxon mould of former days. They are neither imitators nor pupils of each other; they stand uncon-



"THOU SCAREST ME WITH DREAMS AND TERRIFIEST ME THROUGH VISIONS."
From Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job.

nected, and look, each in succession, as a spontaneous growth ; but there is between them a strong link, much stronger indeed than imitation or teaching, namely, inherited blood, tendencies, qualities and moods.

This is the case, for instance, with Rolle of Hampole who died in 1349, who had studied, but who lived in the world and underwent a sudden conversion. He is therefore considered by some as a madman, and by others as a saint. He has visions and ecstasies ; he writes, like Merswin, the account of his moral troubles ; he offers a well-characterised example of duplication of the consciousness. He is visited in his cell and found "writing with great rapidity" ; he is requested to stop writing, and converse for the edification of his visitors ; he talks to them, but without ceasing to write very fast, for two hours, and what he wrote differed entirely from what he said. "The Holy Ghost during the whole time directed his hand and his tongue."¹

After Rolle, came deists like Lord Herbert of Cherbury, religious reformers like Fox, Bunyan and Wesley, poets like Cowper, and painters like Blake. Nearly all of them border on madness. Herbert of Cherbury holds familiar intercourse with God, and having written in 1624 a book in which he denied the inspiration of Scripture, inquires of the Almighty if he had better publish his work. He wants a sign from above, so that he may be sure that, whether or not the Bible is an inspired book, his own is. The event proved that

¹ G. Perry, "English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle of Hampole," London, Early English Text Society, 1866, 8vo, p. xxii.

he had only to ask : " I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud though yet gentle noise came from the heavens. . . . This, how strange soever it may seem, I protest before the eternal God is true, neither am I any way superstitiously deceived herein, since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the serenest sky that ever I saw, being without all cloud, did to my thinking see the place from whence it came." ¹ Concluding from this that, if a divine revelation had been refused to the apostles, he for his part was more highly favoured, he printed his book,² which created a great stir and became the gospel of the deist tribe.

George Fox, in the same century, after witnessing a tavern broil, felt impelled to leave his friends and retire from society. In 1648 he has his famous revelation on the subject of hats. " The Lord . . . forbad me to put off my hat to any high or low, and I was required to Thee and Thou all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small. And as I travelled up and down, I was not to bid people Good morning or Good evening, neither might I bow or scrape with my leg to any one : and this made the sects and professions to rage." ³ For this reason he is called mad, as Langland was. Like our visionary, he seeks solitude, a prey to his thoughts.

¹ " Autobiography," ed. S. L. Lee, London, 1886, p. 249.

² The famous "*De Veritate prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili et a falso.*" Paris, 1624 ; London, 1633.

³ " A journal . . . of the life, travels, sufferings, christian experiences and labour of love, in the work of the ministry of that ancient, eminent and faithful servant of Jesus-Christ, George Fox." Leeds, 6th ed., 1836, 2 vols. 8vo.

"My troubles continued, and I was often under great temptations; I fasted much, and walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible, and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on; and frequently in the night, walked mournfully about by myself: for I was a man of sorrows in the times of the first workings of the Lord in me."¹ With all his roughness and his refusals to salute any one, he has, at bottom, a tender heart; no epithet recurs oftener in his writings; he applies it to all those whom he likes: "I met with a tender people and a very tender woman;"² when he feels well disposed towards himself, he declares that he is "a tender young man." He gave to the sect he founded the name of "Society of Friends," Quaker being a nickname; his letters do not begin with "Sir," but with "Friend."³

Bunyan, in the same time, experienced similar doubts, and passed through the same moral phases. He was "in the middle of a game of cat," and was about to strike his second blow, when he heard a voice which "did suddenly dart from heaven into his soul and said: Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?"⁴ He is converted, but nevertheless is torn by doubts; and his doubts are those of Langland: "Could I think that so many

¹ "A journal ... of the life, travels, &c., of George Fox," year 1647.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 90, 91.

³ A letter to the king, however, begins with: "King Charles, thou camest not. . . ." *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 524.

⁴ "Grace Abounding" (being Bunyan's moral autobiography) in "Entire Works," Stebbing's edition, London, 1859, 4 vols. 4to, vol. i. p. 7.

ten thousands, in so many countries and kingdoms, should be without the knowledge of the right way to heaven (if there were indeed a heaven), and that we only, who live in a corner of the earth, should be blessed therewith? Every one doth think his own religion rightest, both Jews, Moors, and Pagans; and how if all our faith, and Christ and Scriptures should be but a think-so too?"¹ He is regarded with suspicion; and called "a witch, a Jesuit, a highwayman and the like."² Imprisoned in the bridge tower of Bedford, he writes his famous "Pilgrim's Progress" from the "City of Destruction," and the "Slough of Despond," to the "Golden City." He sees all this in a dream, like Langland: "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags. . . ." He reaches the celestial city; he perceives that there is "a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.—So I awoke, and behold, it was a dream."³

The life of Wesley and Whitefield, animated in the XVIIIth century, by a spirit both mystic and practical, is all interspersed with visions; or rather, visions and realities are so closely mingled that it is impossible to distinguish them. They, for their own part, never attempted to draw a line between the two. Like the mystics of the Middle Ages, they hold inter-

¹ "Grace Abounding," *ibid.*, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³ The first edition is of uncertain date; the second appeared in 1678.



"AND BEHOLD, THERE CAME A GREAT WIND FROM THE WILDERNESS. . . ."

From Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job.

course with the Holy Ghost, and teach how others may enjoy a similar favour. "Be therefore, my Lord, much in secret retirement," writes Whitefield, "commune with your own heart in your chamber, and be still; and you will then hear the secret whispers of the Holy Ghost."¹ Whitefield notes the presence of God in certain particular places; the Master of things listens to some of his sermons, but not to all: "This day, Jesus has enabled me to preach seven times: once in the church, twice at the girls' hospital, and afterwards twice in a private house. . . . Both in the church and park the Lord was with us. The girls in the hospital were excessively affected."² Wesley performs miracles; he cures a workman who coughed exceedingly.³ Like the mystics of former times, he is "converted," writes his moral autobiography, and is called insane. "Let not much religion make thee mad," say his friends to him. This spiritual "conversion" is the basis of his entire system; one cannot without it belong truly to the society of "Methodists" which he founded, and for which he devised a special creed of the most ethereal mysticism.⁴

¹ Letter to Lord L., October 26, 1741. "Works," London, 1771, 6 vols. 8vo, vol. i. p. 335.

² October 27, 1741. "Works," vol. i. p. 337.

³ "Now, let candid men judge, does humility require me to deny a notorious fact?" ("A Plain Account of the People called Methodists," 1748; "Works of Wesley," Beecham's edition, 11th ed., London, 1856, 14 vols. 12mo, vol. viii.) Bunyan had only had a temptation to work miracles, but he did not perform them ("Grace Abounding," p. 87).

⁴ A creed made up of four tenets, the main of which was that true religion "is nothing short of or different from the mind that

Tender, gentle, sickly Cowper, whose heart ever was the heart of a child, has, in spite of differences arising from his fragile temperament, many points in common with our visionary. This exquisite being,

Dupe of to-morrow even from a child,¹

bruised and suffering, is so perplexed by the problem of life, as to almost lose his reason. Alternations of faith and doubt shake him so as to bring him to the verge of the grave. For him, the question of an here-after is the sole serious one, and the only problem deserving attention. The matchless badinages we owe to his pen are merely a respite granted to thought weary of labour.

The same anguish tortures Cowper's contemporary, the painter and poet Blake, who appears to have unwittingly assigned to himself the task of reproducing in his water-colours and drawings the grand, mysterious figures evoked by our visionary ; we might even say, the figure of Langland himself. Were we to search for an embodiment of the idea we form of "Longe Will," we should look for it in the drawings of Blake.

The poems of Blake appear the simplest in the world ; they treat of the most ordinary subjects ; but suddenly a deeper note, an allusion to hidden sufferings and wounds, reveals to us that we are not in the presence of a shepherd who pipes, but of a prophet who knows. The effect is grand and strange. Placed on the limit of two centuries, and on the boundary line of two was in Christ ; the image of God stamped upon the heart ; inward righteousness attended with the peace of God, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "A Plain Account," *ibid.*

¹ "On the Receipt of my Mother's picture."



"WHEN THE MORNING STARS SANG TOGETHER AND ALL THE SONS OF GOD
SHOUTED FOR JOY."

From Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job.

periods, Blake is the first in date (but the least in genius) of that group of mysterious and symbol-loving poets, amongst whom are to be ranked Shelley, Rossetti and Browning, poets who shiver at the mere idea of the surrounding triviality, universal ease and fluency, staleness of the higher sentiments taught by rule in schools, and take refuge, out of scorn and vexation, in a thick-veiled darkness, where they know that ease-loving multitudes will not follow them. They mingle with the crowd, like "Longe Will," saluting no one; and the crowd long remains in ignorance of who they are, or, at most, wonders with an incredulous shake of the head, whether, by any possibility or chance, such men as they belong to the chosen people.

Langland, though he is, like Chaucer, a true Englishman, that is, a blending of the Celto-Latin and Germanic races, had more in him of the latter. The English have sprung from the union of these two races, and in most of them, a fusion of the two elements has taken place; the result being the average English character. But, among those distinguished by a genius rising above the common level, we soon perceive, as a rule, whom they take after. All children of a family have in their veins blood of both parents; but some resemble the father and others the mother. Langland, in spite of the practical nature of his judgments, belongs most to the race which had the deepest and especially the earliest knowledge of tender, passionate and mystical aspirations, and which lent itself most willingly to the lulls and pangs of hope and despair, the race of the Anglo-Saxons. Chaucer represents more the lucid,

energetic, decided, practical race of the latinised Celts, with their love of logic, and fondness for straight lines. They both in their works symbolise, by their light and shadows, and an alternate play of sun and clouds, all that splendid English literature which was dawning before their eyes.

The day which we have seen bore a resemblance to that morning dawn.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM LANGLAND.

SOME readers will perhaps find it convenient to be supplied with specimens of the poetry of Langland, of greater length than the quotations given above. The following extracts have been chosen from among the passages discussed in the foregoing pages, and will enable the reader to form, independently of these discussions, an idea of the various moods of our poet, and of the different styles he affects.

The text of Mr. Skeat's Oxford edition has been followed.

I.

BEGINNING OF THE VISIONS.

In a somere seyson · whan softe was the sonne,
Y shop me in-to [shroudes] · as y a shepherde were,
In abit as an ermite · unholy of werkes,
Ich wente forth in the worlde · wonders to hure,
And sawe meny cellis · and selcouthe thynges.
Ac on a may morwenyng · on Malverne hilles
Me byfel for to slepe · for weyrynesse of wandryng ;
And in a launde as ich lay · lenede ich and slepte,
And merveylously me mette · as ich may yow telle ;
Al the welthe of this worlde · and the woo bothe,
Wynkyng as it were · wyterly ich saw hyt,
Of tryuthe and tricherye · of tresoun and of gyle,
Al ich saw slepynge · as ich shal yow telle.
Esteward ich byhulde · after the sonne,
And sawe a toure, as ich trowede · Truthe was ther-ynne ;

Westwarde ich waitede · in a whyle after,
 And sawe a deep dale · Deth as ich lyvede,
 Wonede in tho wones · and wyckede spiritus.
 A fair feld ful of folke · fonde ich ther bytwyne,
 Alle manere of men · the mene and the ryche,
 Worchyng and wandryng · as the worlde asketh.
 Somme putte hem to plow · and pleiden ful seylde,
 In setting and in sowyng · swonken ful harde,
 And wonne that thuse wasters · with glotenye destroyeth.
 Somme putte hem to pruyde · and parailede hem ther-after,
 In contenance and in clothyng · in meny kynne gyse ;
 In praiers and in penaunces · putten hem manye,
 Al for the love of Oure Lorde · lyveden ful harde,
 In hope to have a gode ende · and hevene-ryche blysse ;
 As ances and eremites · that holden hem in hure cellys,
 Coveytyng noght in contrees · to carien a-boute
 For no lykerouse lyflode · hure lykame to plese.
 And somme chosen cheffare · they chevede the betere,
 As hit semeth to oure syght · that soche men thryveth.
 And somme murthes to make · as mynstrals conneth,
 That wollen neyther swynke ne swete · bote swery grete othes,
 And fynde up foule fantesyes · and foles hem maken,
 And haven witte at wyll · to worche yf they wolde.
 That Paul prechith of hem · proven ich myghte.
Qui turpiloquium loquitur · ys Lucyfers knave.
 Bydders and beggers · faste aboute yoden,
 Tyl hure bagge and hure bely · were bretful ygrammyd,
 Faytyng for hure fode · and fouhten atten ale.

C. i. 1.

II.

A PARLIAMENT OF MICE AND RATONS.

With that ran there a route · of ratones at ones,
 And smale mys myd hem · mo then a thousande,
 And comen to a conseille · for here comune profit ;
 For a cat of a courte · cam whan hym lyked,
 And overlepe hem lyghtlich · and lauhte hem at his wille,

And pleyde with hem perilouslych · and possed hem aboute.
 “For doute of dyverse dredes · we dar noughte wel loke ;
 And yif we grucche of his gamen · he wil greve us alle,
 Cracche us, or clowe us · and in his cloches holde,
 That us lotheth the lyf · or he let us passe.
 Myghte we with any witte · his wille withstonde,
 We myghte be lordes aloft · and lyven at owre ese.”

A raton of renon · most renable of tonge,
 Seide for a sovereygne · help to hym-selve ;—
 “I have ysein segges,” quod he · “in the cite of London
 Beren bighes ful brighte · abouten here nekkes,
 And some colers of crafty werk ; · uncoupled they wenden
 Both in wareine and in waste · where hem leve lyketh ;
 And otherwhile thei aren elles-where · as I here telle.
 Were there a belle on here beigh · bi Jhesu as me thynketh,
 Men myghte wite where thei went · and awei renne !
 And right so,” quod that ratoun · “reson me sheweth,
 To bugge a belle of brasse · or of brighte sylver,
 And knitten on a colere · for oure comune profit,
 And hangen it up-on the cattes hals · thanne here we mowen
 Where he ritt or rest · or renneth to playe.
 And yif him list for to laike · thenne loke we mowen,
 And peren in his presence · ther while hym plaie liketh,
 And yif him wrattheth, be ywar · and his weye shonye.”

Alle this route of ratones · to this reson thei assented.
 Ac tho the belle was ybought · and on the bëighe hanged,
 There ne was ratoun in alle the route · for alle the rewme of
 Fraunce,

That dorst have ybounden the belle · aboute the cattis nekke,
 Ne hangen it aboute the cattes hals · al Engelande to wyne ;
 And helden hem unhardy · and here conseilte feble,
 And leten here labour lost · and alle here longe studye.

A mous that moche good · couthe, as me thoughte,
 Stroke forth sternly · and stode biforn hem alle,
 And to the route of ratones · reherced these wordes :
 “Though we culled the catte · yut sholde ther come another,
 To cracchy us and al owre kynde · though we crope under benches.
 For-thi I conseilte alle the comune · to lat the catte worthe,
 And be we never so bolde · the belle hym to shewe ;

For I herde my sire seyn · is sevene yere ypassed,
 There the catte is a kitoun · the courte is ful elyng ;
 That witnisseth holiwrite · who-so wil it rede,

Ve terre ubi puer rex est, etc.

For may no renke there rest have · for ratones bi nyghte ;¹
 The while he caccheth conynges · he coveiteth nought owre
 caroyne,

But fet hym al with venesoun · defame we hym nevere.
 For better is a litel losse · than a longe sorwe,
 The mase amonge us alle . though we mysse a schrewe.
 For many mannus malt · we mys wolde destruye,
 And also ye route of ratones · rende mennes clothes,
 Nere that cat of that courte · that can yow overlepe :
 For had ye rattes yowre wille · ye couthe nought reule yowre-selve.
 I sey for me," quod the mous · "I se so mykel after,
 Shal never the cat ne the kitoun · bi my conseil be greved,
 Ne carpyng of this coler · that costed me nevre.
 And though it had coste me catel · biknowen it I nolde,
 But suffre as hym-self wolde · to do as kym liketh,
 Coupled and uncoupled · to cacche what thei mowe.
 For-thi uche a wise wighte I warne · wite wel his owne."

What this meteles bemeneth · ye men that be merye,
 Devine ye, for I ne dar · bi dere God in hevene !

B. Prol. 145.

III.

LADY MEED AT COURT.—FLIGHT OF HER COMPANIONS.

The King orders that Meed be brought before him and that her companions be sent to prison :

"Go atache tho tyraunis · for eny tresour, ich hote,
 Let feterye fast Falsnesse · for eny kynnes giftes,
 And gurd of Gyles hefd · and lete hym go no wyddere,
 And brynge Mede to me · maugre hem alle.

¹ This line is apparently misplaced ; it ought to come, it seems, lower, possibly after the verse : "And also ye route of ratones," &c.

And if ye lacche Lyere · let hym nat a-skapie
 Er he be put on the pullery · for eny preier, ich hote !”
 Drede stod at the dore · and al that duene herde,
 What the kynges wil was · and wyghtlyche he wente,
 And bad Falsnesse to flee · and hus feren alle.
 Falsnesse for fere tho · fleghe to the freres,
 And Gyle dud hym to gon · agast for to deye ;
 Ac marchauns metten with hym · and made hym abyde,
 And shuten hym in here shoppes · to shewen here ware,
 And parailed hym lyke here prentys · the puple to serven.
 Lyghtliche Lyere · lep a-way thennes,
 Lorkynge thorw lanes · to-logged of menye.
 He was nawher welcome · for hus meny tales,
 Over-al houted out · and yhote trusse,
 Til pardoners hadden pitte · and pullede hym to house.
 Thei woshe hym and wypede hym · and wonde hym in cloutes,
 And sente hym on sonnedayes · with seeles to churches,
 And gaf pardon for pans · pound-meel a-boute.
 Thanne lourede leches · and letters thei senten,
 That Lyer shold wony with hem · waters to loke.
 Spicers to hym speke · to aspice here ware,
 For he can on here crafte · and knoweth meny gommies.
 Ac mynstrales and messagers · mette with Lyere ones,
 And with-helde hym half a yere · and elleve dayes.
 Ac Freres thorw fayre speche · fetten hym thennes ;
 For knowynge of comers · thei copyde hym as a frere ;
 Ac he hath leve to lepen out · as ofte as hym lyketh,
 And ys welcome whanne he cometh · and woneth with hem ofte.
 Symonye and Cyvyle · senten to Rome,
 And putte hem thorw a-peles · in the popes grace.
 Ac Conscience to the kyng · a-cusede hem bothe,
 And seide, “syre kyng, by Cryst · bothe clerkus amende,
 Thi kyngdom thorw here covetyse · wol out of kynde wende,
 And holy churche thorw hem · worth harmed for evere.”
 Alle fledden for fere · and flowen in-to hernes ;
 Save Mede the mayde · no mo dorste a-byde.
 Ac treweliche to telle · hue tremblede for fere,
 And both wrang and wepte · whanne hue was a-tached.

IV.

MEED AT COURT.—HER SUPPORTERS.

Meed has been brought to Westminster. While waiting for the King, who is at his council, would-be friends surround Meed :

And there was myrthe and mynstralceye · Mede to plesce.
 They that wonyeth in Westmynstre · worschipped hir alle ;
 Gentelliche with joye · the justices somme
 Busked hem to the boure · there the bird dwelled,
 To conforte hire kyndely · by clergise leve,
 And seiden : “Mourne nought, Mede · ne make thow no sorwe,
 For we wil wisse the kyng · and thi wey shape,
 To be wedded at thi wille · and where the leve liketh,
 For al Conscience caste · or craft as I trowe !”

Mildeliche Mede thanne · mercyed hem alle
 Of theire gret goodnesse · and gaf hem uchone
 Coupes of clene golde · and coppis of silver.
 Rynges with rubies · and ricchesses manye,
 The leste man of here meyne · a motoun of golde.
 Thanne lauhte thei leve · this lordes, at Mede.

With that comen clerkis · to conforte hir the same,
 And beden hir be blithe · “for we beth thine owne,
 For to worche thi wille · the while thow myghte laste.”
 Hendeliche heo thanne · bihight hem the same,
 To “love you lelli · and lordes to make,
 And in the consistorie atte courte · do calle yowre names ;
 Shal no lewdnesse lette · the leode that I love,
 That he ne worth first avanced · for I am biknowen
 Ther konnyng clerkes · shul klokke bihynde.”

Thanne come there a confessoure · coped as a frere,
 To Mede the mayde · he inellud his wordes,
 And seide ful softly · in shrifte as it were,
 “Theigh lewed men and lered men · had leyne by the bothe,
 And falsenesse haved yfolwed the · al this fyfty wyntre,
 I shal assoille the my-selve · for a seme of whete,
 And also be thi bedeman · and bere wel thi mesage,
 Amonges knightes and clerkis · conscience to torne.”

Thanne Mede for here mysdedes · to that man kneled,
 And shrove hire of hire shrewednesse · shamelees, I trowe,
 Tolde hym a tale · and toke hym a noble,
 Forto ben hire bedeman · and hire brokour als.

Thanne he assoilled hire sone · and sithen he seyde,
 “We han a wyndowe a wirchyng · wil sitten us ful heigh :
 Woldestow glase that gable · and grave there-inne thi name,
 Siker sholde thi soule be · hevene to have.”
 “Wist I that,” quod that womman · “I wolde nought spare
 For to be yowre frende, frere · and faille yow nevre
 Whil ye love lordes · that lechery haunteth,
 And lakketh nought ladis · that loveth wel the same.
 It is frelte of flesh · ye fynde it in bokes,
 And a course of kynde · wher-of we komen alle ;
 Who may scape the sklaundre · the skathe is sone amended ;
 It is synne of the sevene · sonnest relessed.

Have mercy,” quod Mede · “ot men that it haunte,
 And I shal kevre yowre kirke · yowre cloystre do maken,
 Woves do whiten · and wyndowes glasen,
 Do peynten and purtraye · and paye for the makynge,
 That evry segge shal seyn · I am sustre of yowre hous.”

Ac God to alle good folke · suche gravynge defendeth,
 To writen in wyndowes · of here wel dedes,
 On aventure pruyde be peynted there · and pompe of the worlde ;
 For Crist knoweth thi conscience · and thi kynde wille,
 And thi coste and thi coveitise · and who the catel oughthe.

For-thi I lere yow, lordes · leveth such werkes,
 To writen in wyndowes · of yowre wel dedes,
 Or to greden after Goddis men · whan ye delen doles ;
 An aventure ye han yowre hire here · and youre hevene als ;

Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextra.

B. iii. 11.

V.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENTS.

I

Thus ich a-waked, God wot · whanne ich woned on Cornhulle,
 Kytte and ich in a cote · clothed as a lollere,

And lytel y-lete by · leyve me for sothe,
 Among lollares of London · and lewede heremytes ;
 For ich made of tho men · as reson me tauhte.
 For as ich cam by Conscience · with Reson ich mette
 In an hote hervest · whenne ich hadde myn hele,
 And lymes to labore with · and lovede wel fare,
 And no dede to do · bote drynke and to slepe.
 In hele and in unite · on me aposede,
 Romyng in remembraunce · thus Reson me aratede.

“Canstow serven,” he seide · “other syngen in a churche,
 Other coke for my cokers · other to the cart picche,
 Mowe other mowen · other make bond to sheves,
 Repe other be a repereyve · and a-ryse erliche,
 Other have an horne and be haywarde · and liggen oute a nyghtes,
 And kepe my corn in my croft · fro pykers and theeves ?
 Other shappe shon other clothes · other shep other kyn kepe,
 Heggen other harwen · other swyn other gees dryve,
 Hem that bedreden be · by-lyve to fynde ?”

“Certes,” ich seyde · “and so me God helpe,
 Ich am to waik to worche · with sykel other with sythe,
 And to long, leyf me · lowe for to stoupe,
 To worchen as a workeman · eny whyle to dure,”
 “Thenne havest thou londes to lyve by,” quath Reson, “other
 lynage riche

That fynden the thy fode ? · for an ydel man thou semest,
 A spendour that spende mot · other a spille-tyme,
 Other beggest thy bylyve · a-boute at menne hacches,
 Other faitest up-on frydays · other feste-dayes in churches,
 The whiche is lollarene lyf · that lytel ys preysed,
 Ther ryghtfulnesse rewardeth · ryght as men deserveth,

Reddit unicuique juxta opera sua.

Other thou art broke, so may be · in body other in membre,
 Other ymaymed throw som mys-hap · wher-by thou myght be
 excused ?”

“Whanne ich yong was,” quath ich · “meny yer hennes,
 My fader and my frendes · founden me to scole,
 Tyl ich wiste wyterliche · what holy wryt menede,
 And what is best for the body · as the bok telleth,
 And sykerest for the soule · by so ich wolde continue.

And yut fond ich nevere in faith · sytthen my frendes deyden,
 Lyf that me lyked · bote in thes longe clothes.
 Yf ich by laboure sholde lyve · and lyfode deserven,
 That labour that ich lerned best · ther-with lyve ich sholde ;

In eadem vocatione in qua vocati estis, manete.

And ich lyve in Londone · and on Londone bothe,
 The lomes that ich laboure with · and lyfode deserve,
 Ys *pater-noster* and my prymer · *placebo* and *dirige*.
 And my sauter som tyme · and my sevene psalmes.
 Thus ich synge for hure soules · of suche as me helpen,
 And tho that fynden me my fode · vouchen saf, ich trowe,
 To be welcome whanne ich come · other-whyle in a monthe
 Now with hym and now with hure · and thus-gate ich begge
 With-oute bagge other botel · bote my wombe one.
 And al-so more-over · me thynketh, syre Reson,
 Men sholde constreyne no clerke · to knauene werkes ;
 For by the lawe of *Levitici* · that Oure Lorde ordeynede,
 Clerkes that aren crowned · of kynde understondyng
 Sholde nother swynke ne swete · ne swere at enquestes ;
 Ne fyghte in no vauntwarde · ne hus so greve,

Non reddas malum pro malo.

For it ben aires of hevene · alle that ben crownede,
 And in queer and in kirkes · Cristes owene mynestres,
 Hit by-cometh for clerkus · Crist for to serven,
 And knaves uncrowned · to cart and to worche.
 For shold no clerk be crowned · bote yf he ycome were
 Of franklens and free men · and of folke yweddede.

Dominus pars hereditatis mee ; et alibi : Clementia non constringit.

Bondmen and bastardes · and beggers children,
 Thuse by-longeth to labour · and lordes kyn to serven
 Bothe God and good men · as here degree asketh ;
 Some to synge masses · other sitten and wryte,
 Rede and receyve · that reson ouhte spende ;
 Ac sith bondemenne barnes · han be mad bisshopes,
 And barnes bastardes · han ben archidekenes,
 And sopers and here sones · for selver han be knyghtes,
 And lordene sones here laborers · and leid here rentes to wedde,
 For the ryght of this reame · ryden a-yens owre enemys,
 In conforte of the comune · and the kynges worshep,

And monkes and moniales · that mendinauns sholden fynde,
 Han mad here kyn knyghtes · and knyghtfees purchased,
 Popes and patrones · poure gentil blood refuseth,
 And taken Symondes sone · seyntwarie to kepe,
 Lyf-holynesse and love · han ben longe hennes,
 And wole, til hit be wered out · or otherwise ychaunged.
 For-thy rebuke me ryght nouht · Reson, ich yow praye;
 For in my conscience ich knowe · what Crist wolde that ich
 wrouhte,

Preyers of a parfyt man · and penaunce discret
 Ys the leveste labour · that oure lord pleseth,
 “*Non de solo*,” ich seide · “for sothe *vixit homo*,
Nec in pane et pabulo · the *pater-noster* witnesseth;
Fiat voluntas tua · fynt ous alle thynges.”

Quath Conscience, “by Crist · ich can nat see this lyeth;
 Ac it semeth nouht parfyttesse · in cytees for to begge,
 Bote he be obediencer · to pryour other to mynstre.”

“That ys soth,” ich seide · “and so ich by-knowe,
 That ich have tynt tyme · and tyme mysspended;
 And yut, ich hope, as he · that ofte haveth chaffared,
 That ay hath lost and lost · and atte laste hym happed
 He bouhte suche a bargayn · he was the bet evere,
 And sette hus lost at a lef · at the laste ende,
 Such a wynnyng hym warth · thorw wordes of hus grace;

Simile est regnum celorum thesauro abscondito in agro, etc.

Mulier que invenit dragmam unam, etc.;

So hope ich to have · of hym that is al-mychty
 A gobet of hus grace · and bygynne a tyme,
 That alle tymes of my tyme · to profit shal turne.”

“Ich rede the,” quath Reson tho · “rape the to by-gynne
 The lyf that ys lowable · and leel to the soule.”

“Ye and continue,” quath Conscience · and to the kirke ich wente.

And to the kirke gan ich go · God to honourie,
 By-for the crois on my knees · knocked ich my brest,
 Sykyng for my synnes · seggyng my *pater-noster*,
 Wepyng and wailinge.

2

And so my witte wex and wanyed · til I a fole were,
 And somme lakked my lyf · allowed it fewe,
 And leten me for a lorel · and loth to reverencen
 Lordes or ladyes · or any lyf elles,
 As persones in pellure · with pendauntes of sylver ;
 To serjauntz ne to suche · seyde noughte ones,
 “God loke yow, lordes !” · ne louted faire ;
 That folke helden me a fole · and in that folye I raved,
 Til Resoun hadde reuthe on me · and rokked me aslepe.

B. xv. 5.

VI.

A TAVERN SCENE.

Now by-gynneth Gloton · for to go to shryfte,
 And kayres hym to-kirke-ward · hus coupe to shewe.
 Fastyng on a fryday · forth gan he wende
 By Betone hous the brewestere · that bad hym good morwe,
 And whederwarde he wolde · the brew-wif hym asked.
 “To holy churche,” quath he · “for to hure masse ;
 And sitthen sitte and be yshrive · and synwe namore.”
 “Ich have good ale, godsyb · Gloton, wolt thou assaye ?”
 “What havest thou,” quath he · “eny hote spices ?”
 “Ich have piper and pionys · and a pound of garlik,
 A ferthyng-worth of fynkelsede · for fastinge-daies.”

Thenne goth Gloton yn · and grete othes after.
 Sesse the sywestere · sat on the benche,
 Watte the warynere · and hus wif dronke,
 Thomme the tynkere · and tweye of hus knaves,
 Hicke the hakeneyman · and Houwe the neldere,
 Claryce of Cockeslane · the clerk of the churche,
 Syre Peeres of Prydie · and Purnel of Flaundres,
 An haywarde and an heremyte · the hangeman of Tyborne,
 Dauwe the dykere · with a dosen harlotes
 Of portours and of pykepörses · and pylede toth-drawers,
 A rybibour and a ratoner · a rakere and hus knave,
 A ropere and a redyngkynge · and Rose the disshere,
 Godefray the garlek-mongere · and Griffyn the Walish ;
 And of up-holders an hep · erly by the morwe

Geven Gloton with glad chere · good ale to hansele.

Clemment the coblere · cast of hus cloke,
 And to the newe fayre · nempned hit to selle.
 Hicke the hakeneyman · hitte hus hod after,
 And bad Bette the bouchere · to be on hus syde.
 Ther were chapmen y-chose · the chaffare to preise ;
 That he that hadde the hod · sholde nat habbe the cloke ;
 The betere thyng by arbytours · sholde bote the werse.
 Two rysen rapliche · and rounede to-geders,
 And preysed the penyworthes · apart by hem-selve,
 And ther were othes an hepe · for other sholde have the werse
 Thei couthe nouht by here conscience · a-corde for treuthe,
 Tyl Robyn the ropere · aryse thei bysouhte,
 And nempned hym a nompeyr · that no debate were.

Hicke the hakeneyman · hadde the cloke,
 In covenant that Clement · sholde the coppe fylle,
 And have the hakeneymannes hod · and hold hym y-served ;
 And who repentyde rathest · shold aryse after,
 And grete syre Gloton · with a galon of ale.

Ther was lauhyng and lakeryng · and “let go the coppe !”
 Bargeynes and bevereges · by-gunne to aryse,
 And setyn so til evesong rang · and songe umbwhyle,
 Til Gloton hadde yglobbed · a galon and a gylle. . . .

He myghte nother stappe ne stonde · tyl he a staf hadde.
 Thanne gan he go · lyke a glemannes bycche,
 Som tyme asyde · and som tyme a-rere,
 As ho so laith lynes · for to lacche foules.

And when he drow to the dore ; thanne dymmed hus eyen ;
 He thrumbled at the threshefold · and threw to the erthe.
 Tho Clement the coblere · cauhte hym by the mydel,
 For to lyfte hym on loft · he leyde hym on hus knees ;
 Ac Gloton was a gret cherl · and gronyd in the lifynge. . . .

With al the wo of the worlde · hus wif and hus wenche
 Bere hym to hus bedde · and brouhte hym ther-ynne ;
 And after al this excesse · he hadde an accidie,
 He slep Saterdag and Sunday · tyl sonne yede to reste.
 Thenne awakyde he wel wan · and wolde have ydronke ;
 The ferst word that he spak · was “ho halt the bolle ?”

VII.

“ACCIDIA,” OR THE LAZY PARSON.

Thanne come Sleuthe al bislabered · with two slymy eighen :
 “I most sitte,” seyde the segge · “or elles shulde I nappe ;
 I may noughte stonde ne stoupe · ne with-oute a stole knele.
 Were I broughte abedde . . .
 Sholde no ryngyng do me ryse · ar I were rype to dyne.”
 He bygan *benedicite* with a bolke · and his brest knocked,
 And roxed and rored · and rutte atte laste.
 “What ! awake, renke !” quod Repentance · “and rape the to
 shrifte ”

“If I shulde deye bi this day · me liste noughte to loke ;
 I can noughte perfytly my *pater-noster* · as the prest hit syngeth,
 But I can rymes of Robyn Hood · and Randolf erle of Chestre,
 Ac neither of Owre Lorde ne of Owre Lady · the leste that evere
 was made.

I have made vowes fourty · and for-yete hem on the morne ;
 I parfourned nevre penaunce · as the prest me highte,
 Ne ryghte sori for my synnes · yet was I nevre.
 And yif I bidde any bedes · but if it be in wrath,
 That I telle with my tonge · is two myle fro myne herte.
 I am occupied eche day · haliday and other,
 With ydel tales atte ale · and otherwhile in cherches ;
 Goddes peyne and his passioun · ful selde thynke I there-on.

I visited nevre fieble men · ne fettered folke in puttes ;
 I have levere here an harlotrie · or a somer-game of souteres,
 Or lesynges to laughe at · and belye my neighbore,
 Than al that evere Marke made · Mathew, John, and Lucas.
 And vigilies and fastyng-dayes · alle thise late I passe,
 And ligge abedde in lenten · an my lemman in myn armes,
 Tyl matynes and masse be do · and thanne go to the freres ;
 Come I to *ite missa est* · I holde me yserved.
 I nam noughte shryven some tyme · but if sekenesse it make,
 Nought tweies in two yere · and thanne up gesse I shryve me.

I have be prest and parsoun · passyng thretti wynter,
 Yete can I neither solfe ne synge · ne seyntes lyves rede,
 But I can fynde in a felde · or in a fourlonge an hare,
 Better than in *beatus vir* · or in *beati omnes*

Construe oon clause wel · and kenne it to my parochienes.
 I can holde lovedayes · and here a reves rekenynge,
 Ac in canoun ne in decretales · I can nought rede a lyne.

B. v. 392.

VIII.

“POURE FOLKE IN COTES.”

The most needy aren oure neighebores · and we nyme good hede,
 As prisonnes in puttes · and poure folke in cotes,
 Charged with children · and chef lordes rente,
 That thei with spynnyng may spare · spenen hit in hous-hyre,
 Bothe in mylk and in mele · to make with papelotes,
 To a-glotye with here gurles · that greden after fode.
 Al-so hem-selve · suffren muche hunger,
 And wo in winter-tyme · with wakyng a nyghtes
 To ryse to the ruel · to rocke the cradel,
 Bothe to karde and to kembe · to clouten and to wasche,
 To rubbe and to rely · russches to pilie,
 That reuthe is to rede · othere in ryme shewe
 The wo of these women · that wonyeth in cotes ;
 And of meny other men · that muche wo suffren,
 Bothe a-fyngrede and a-furst · to turne the fayre outwarde,
 And beth abasshed for to begge · and wolle nat be aknowe
 What hem needeth at here neihebores · at non and at even.
 That ich wot witerly · as the worlde techeth,
 What other by-hoveth · that hath meny children,
 And hath no catel bote hus crafte · to clothy hem and to fede,
 And fele to fonge ther-to · and fewe pans taketh.
 There is payn and peny-ale · as for a pytaunce y-take,
 Colde flessch and cold fyssh · for veneson ybake ;
 Frydayes and fastyng-dayes · a farthyng-worth of muscles
 Were a feste for suche folke · other so fele cockes.
 These were almes, to helpe · that han suche charges,
 And to comfortie such cotyers · and crokede men and blynde.
 Ac beggers with bagges · the whiche brewhouses ben here
 churches,
 Bote thei be blynde other broke · other elles be syke,
 Thauh he falle for defaute · that faiteth for hus lyf-lode,
 Reccheth nevere, ye ryche · thauh suche lorelles sterven.

C. x. 71.

IX.

"LEWEDE EREMYTES."

. . . And lewede eremytes,

That loken full lougheliche · to lacchen mennes almesse,
In hope to sitten at even · by the hote coles,
Unlouke hus legges abrod · other lygge at hus ese,
Reste hym, and roste hym · and his ryg turne,
Drynke drue and deepe · and drawe hym thanne to bedde ;
And when hym lyketh and lust · hus leve ys to aryse ;
When he ys rysen, rometh out · and ryght wel aspieth
Whar he may rathest have a repast · other a rounde of bacon,
Sulver other sode mete . and som tyme bothe,
A loof other half a loof · other a lompe of chese ;
And carieth it hom to hus cote · and cast him to lyve
In ydelnesse and in ese · aud by others travayle.
And what frek of thys folde · fisketh thus a-boute,
With a bagge at hus bak · a begeneldes wyse,
And can som manere craft · in cas he wolde hit use,
Thorgh whiche crafte he couthe · come to bred and to ale,
And over-more to an hater · to helye with hus bones,
And lyveth lyk a lollere · Godes lawe hym dampneth.

.

Ac these eremytes that edefyen thus · by the hye weyes,
Whilom were workmen · webbes and taillours,
And carters knaves · and clerkus with-oute grace,
Helden ful hungry hous · and hadde much defaute,
Long labour and lyte wynnynge · and atte laste aspiden,
That faitours in frere clothynge · hadde fatte chekus.
For-thi lefte thei here laboure · these lewede knaves,
And clothed hem in copes · clerkus as hit were,
Other on of som ordre · othere elles a prophete.

.

Wher see we hem on sonedays · the servyse to huyre,
As, matyns by the morwe ? · tyl masse by-gynne,
Other sonedays at evesonge · seo we wel fewe !
Othere labory for here liflode · as the lawe wolde ?

Ac at mydday meel-tyme · ich mete with hem ofte,
 Comynge in a cope · as he a clerke were ;
 A bacheler other a beaupere · best hym by-semeth ;
 And for the cloth that kevereth hym · cald is he a frere,
 Wassheth and wypeth · and with the furste sitteth,
 Ac while he wrought in thys worlde · and wan hus mete with
 treuthe,

He sat atte sydbenche · and secounde table ;
 Cam no wyn in hus wombe · thorw the weke longe,
 Nother blankett in hus bed · ne white bred by-fore hym.
 The cause of al thys caitifte · cometh of meny bisshopes,
 That suffren suche sottes · and othere synnes regne ;
 Certes, ho so thurste hit segge · *Symon quasi dormit ;*
Vigilare were fairour · for thow hast gret charge.
 For meny waker wolves · ben broke in-to foldes ;
 Thyne berkeres ben al blynde · that bryngeth forth thy lambren,
Dispergentur oves · thi dogge dar nat berke.

C. x. 140, 203, 242.

X.

THE DOUBTS OF "CUNNYNGE CLERKES" AND THE FAITH OF "PASTOURES."

On Gode Fridaye I fynde · a feloun was ysaved,
 That had lyved al his lyf · with lesynges and with thefte ;
 And for he biknewe on the crosse · and to Cryste schrof hym,
 He was sonnere saved · than seynt Johan the baptiste,
 And or Adam or Ysaye · or eny of the prophetes,
 That hadde yleine with Lucyfer · many longe yeres.
 A robbere was yraunceouned · rather than thei alle,
 With-oute any penaunce of purgatorie · to perpetuel blisse.

Thanne Marye Magdaleyne · what womman dede worse ?
 Or who worse than David · that Uries deth conspired ?
 Or Poule the apostle · that no pitee hadde,
 Moche crystene kynde · to kylle to deth ?
 And now ben thise as sovercynes · wyth seyntes in hevene,
 Tho that wroughte wikkedlokest · in worlde tho thei were.
 And tho that wisely wordeden · and wryten many bokes
 Of witte and of wisdom · with dampned soules wonye. . . .

The doughtiest doctour · and devynoure of the Trinitee,
Was Augustyn the olde · and heighest of the foure,
Sayde thus in a sarmoun · I seigh it writen ones,

Ecce ipsi idioti rapiunt celum, ubi nos sapientes in inferno mergimur :

And is to mene to Englishe men · more ne lasse,
“Aren none rather yravysshed · fro the righte byleve
Than ar this cunnyng clerkes · that conne many bokes ;
Ne none sonner saved · ne sadder of bileve,
Than plowmen and pastoures · and pore comune laboreres.”
Souteres and shepherdes · suche lewede jottes
Percen with a *pater-noster* · the paleys of hevene,
And passen purgatorie penaunceles · at her hennes-partynge,
In-to the blisse of paradys · for her pure byleve,
That inparfitly here · knewe and eke lyved.

Yee men knowe clerkes · that han cursed the tyme,
That evere thei couthe or knewe more · than *Credo in Deum*
Patrem.

B. x. 414, 452.

XI.

HARROWING OF HELL.—EASTER BELLS.

A voys loude in that light · to Lucifer seide,
“Prince of this paly · prest undo the gates,
For here cometh with coroune · the kyng of alle glorie.”
Thenne syhede Satan · and seide to helle,
“Suche a light a-geyns our leve · Lazar hit fette ;
Colde care and combraunce · is come to ous alle.
Yf this kyng come yn · mankynde wol he fecche,
And leden hit ther Lazar is · and lightliche me bynde.
Patriarkes and Prophetes · han parlen her-of longe,
That suche a lorde and a lyght · shal leden hem alle hennes.
Ac rys up Ragamoffyn · and reche me alle the barres
That Belial thy bel-syre · beot with thy damme,
And ich shal lette this lorde · and hus light stoppe ;
Ar we thorw bryghtnesse be blent · barre we the gates.
Cheke we and cheyne we · and eche chyne stoppe,
That no light leope yn · at lover ne at loupe.
And thow, Astrot, hot out · and have oute oure knaves,

Coltyng and al hus kynne · our catel to save.
 Brynston boilaunt · brennyng out-casteth hit
 Al hot on here heuedes · that entren ny the walles.
 Setteth bowes of brake · and brasene gonnes,
 And sheteth out shot ynowh · hus shultrom to blende.
 Sette Mahon at the mangonel · and mulle-stones throweth,
 With crokes and with kalketrappes · a-cloye we hem echone ! ”

“Lusteneth,” quath Lucifer · “for ich this lord knowe,
 Bothe this lord and this lyght · is longe gon ich knew hym.
 May no deth this lord dere · ne no deoveles queyntise ” . . .

“What lord art thou ? ” quath Lucifer ; · a voys aloud seyde,
 “The lord of myght and of mayn · that made alle thynges.
 Duke of this dymme place · a-non undo the gates,
 That Crist mowe comen in · the kynges sone of hevene.”
 And with that breth helle brake · with alle Beliales barres ;
 For eny wye other warde · wyde openede the gates.
 Patriarkes and prophetes · *populus in tenebris*,
 Songen with Seint Johan · “*Ecce agnus Dei !*”
 Lucifer loke ne myghte · so lyghte him a-blente ;
 And tho that Oure Lord lovede · with that lyght forth flowen . . .
 Treuthe trompede tho, and song · “*Te Deum laudamus*” ;
 And then lutede Love · in a lowd note,

“*Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum est habitare fratres in unum !*”

Tyl the day dawede · these damseles daunsede,
 That men rang to the resurreccioun · and with that ich awakede,
 And kallyd Kytte my wyf · and Kalote my doughter,
 “A-rys, and go reverence · Godes resurreccioun,
 And creop on kneos to the croys · and cusse hit for a juwel,
 And ryghtfullokest a relyk · non riccher on erthe.
 For Godes blesside body · hit bar for oure bote,
 And hit a-fereth the feonde · for such is the myghte,
 May no grysliche gost · glyde ther hit shadeweth ! ”

C. xxi. 273, 363, 469-

XII.

(From "Richard the Redeless.")

MEETING OF PARLIAMENT.—FAITHFUL AND FAITHLESS MEMBERS.

The treasury being empty, owing to the extravagance of Richard, Parliament meets in accordance with the royal summons, but it is a packed Parliament, and the poet thus describes it, in "Richard the Redeless":

Whanne the reot and the revell · the rent thus passid,
 And no thing y-lafte · but the bare baggis,
 Then ffelle it afforse · to fille hem ageyne,
 And ffeyned sum ffolie · that filid hem never,
 And cast it be colis · with her conceill at evene,
 To have prevy parlement · for profit of hem-self,
 And lete write writtis · all in wex closid,
 Ffor peeris and prelatis · that thei apere shuld,
 And sente side sondis · to schrevys·aboute,
 To chese swiche chevalleris · as the charge wold,
 To schewe ffor the schire · in company with the grete.
 And whanne it drowe to the day · of the dede-doyng,
 That sovereynes were semblid · and the schire-knyghtis,
 Than, as her fforme is, ffrist · they begynne to declare
 The cause of her comynge · and than the kyngis will.

Comliche a clerk than · comsid the wordis,
 And pronouncid the poyntis · aparte to hem alle,
 And meved ffor money · more than ffor out eliis,
 In glosinge of grette · lest greyves arise.
 And whanne the tale was tolde · anon to the ende,
 A-morwe thei must, affore mete · mete to-gedir,
 The knyghtis of the comunete · and carpe of the maters,
 With citiseyns of shiris · y-sent ffor the same,
 To reherse the articlis · and graunt all her askynge.
 But yit ffor the manere · to make men blynde,
 Somme argued ageyn rith · then a good while,
 And said, "we beth servantis · and sallere ffongen,
 And y-sent ffro the shiris · to shewe what hem greveth,

And to parle ffor her prophete · and passe no fferthere,
 And to graunte of her gold · to the grett wattis
 By no manere wronge way · but if werre were ;
 And if we ben ffalls · to tho us here ffyndeth,
 Evyll be we worthy · to welden oure hire.”
 Than satte summe · as siphre doth in awgrym,
 That noteth a place · and no-thing availith ;
 And some had ysoupid · with Symond overe even,
 And schewed ffor the schire · and here schew lost ;
 And somme were tituleris · and to the kyng wente,
 And fformed him of ffoos · that good ffreendis weren,
 That bablid ffor the best · and no blame served
 Of kynge ne conceyll · ne of the comunes nother,
 Ho so toke good kepe · to the *culorum*.
 And somme slombrid and slepte · and said but a lite ;
 And somme mafflid with the mouth · and nyst what they mente ;
 And somme had hire · and helde ther-with evere,
 And wolde no fforther affoot · ffor ffer of her maistris ;
 And some were so soleyne · and sad of her wittis,
 That er they come to the clos · acombrid they were,
 That thei the conclucioun than · constrewe ne couthe,
 No burne of the benche · of borowe nother ellis,
 So blynde and so ballid · and bare was the reson . . .
 And some dradde dukis · and Do-well ffor-soke.

“Richard the Redeless,” iv. 20, 93.

GLOSSARY.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Ac</i>, but.
 <i>Accidie</i>, from “accidia,” laziness, torpor.
 <i>A-cloye</i>, drive a nail into (Fr. “enclouer”), embarrass, cause great trouble.
 <i>Acombrid</i>, clogged.
 <i>Afyngred</i>, famished.
 <i>Afyrst</i>, athirst.
 <i>A-glotye</i>, to feed.
 <i>Air</i>, heir.
 <i>Ancres</i>, anchorets.
 <i>And</i>, if.
 <i>Apose</i>, to ask questions, to argue.
 <i>Arate</i>, to reprove.
 <i>A-scapie</i>, to escape.
 <i>Awgrym</i>, arithmetic.</p> <p><i>Ballid</i>, bald.
 <i>Be</i>, by.
 <i>Beaupere</i>, reverend father.
 <i>Bedeman</i>, beadman (who says prayers).
 <i>Bedes</i>, beads, prayers.
 <i>Bedreden</i>, bedridden.</p> | <p><i>Begēnelde</i>, beggar.
 <i>Belsyre</i>, grandfather.
 <i>Beot</i>, from “beeten,” to beat, to knock.
 <i>Berkeres</i>, barkers (dogs).
 <i>Bighes</i>, collars.
 <i>Bihight</i>, from “bi-heten,” to promise.
 <i>Biknowen</i>, to acknowledge, to confess.
 <i>Bislabeled</i>, soiled.
 <i>Blent</i>, from “blenden,” to blind.
 <i>Bolke</i>, belch.
 <i>Borowe</i>, borough.
 <i>Bote</i>, to make things equal.
 <i>Bote</i>, recompense, safeguard.
 <i>Brake</i>, winch (of a bow), “bows of brake.”
 <i>Bretful</i>, brimful.
 <i>Buggen</i>, to buy.
 <i>Burne</i>, man.
 <i>Busken</i>, to go with haste.
 <i>Bydden</i>, to beg.
 <i>Bydders</i>, beggars.
 <i>By-howeth</i>, is the fate of.</p> |
|---|---|

By-lyve, food, what to live on.

Canstow, canst thou.

Carien, to wander.

Caroyne, carcass.

Casten, to arrange, to prepare.

Catel, property, wealth.

Chaffare, *cheffare*, merchandise ;
to bargain.

Chapmen, merchants.

Cheveden, from "cheven," to
prosper.

Chyne, chink.

Clokken, to hobble, to walk with
difficulty.

Glos, conclusion.

Clouten, to mend clothes.

Clowe, to claw.

Colis, deceits.

Comsid, commenced.

Connec, to know, to understand.

Coupe, sin ("culpa").

Couthe, from "conne," to know.

Cracchen, scratch.

Cullen, to kill.

Culorum, end, conclusion (from
"sæcula sæculorum").

Damme, dame, mother.

Demcn, to judge, to decide.

Duenc, din.

Elynge, lonely, wretched.

Faille, to fail, to want.

Faiten, to beg.

Faitour, beggar.

Faytynge, begging.

Fele, many.

Fere, companion.

Fet, from "fedem," to feed.

Feterye, to fetter.

Fetten, to fetch.

Fformed, informed.

Fisketh, wanders.

Fonge, to take, to grasp.

For, for fear of.

Frek, being, fellow.

Fynden, to find, to provide.

Fynkelsede, fennel seed.

Glosinge, giving wrong interpre-
tations.

Gobet, morsel.

Godsyb, gossip.

Gommes, gums.

Greden, to cry out.

Greyves, grievances.

Grucchen, to grumble.

Gurden, to knock down.

Gurles, children (of either sex).

Hacches, hatches, buttery doors.

Hals, neck.

Harlotes, rascals (men).

Ilater, clothes.

Hefd, head.

Heggen, to plant or keep up
hedges.

Hele, health.

Helye, to cover.

Hendeliche, courteously.

Heo, she, they.

Here, their ; of them ; to hear.

Herne, nook.

Highte, from "haten," to call, to
command, to promise.

Hit, it ; they.

Hitten, to knock down.
Ho, who.
Hot, from "haten," to call.
Hoten, to prescribe.
Hulles, hills.
Hure, to hear ; hire ; their, her.
Hus, house ; his ; their.

Ich, I.

Jottes, peasants.

Kalketrappes, calthrops.
Kayres, from "kairen," to go to.
Kennen, to teach, to explain.
Kevre, to cover.
Konnynge, knowing.
Kynde, nature.
Kynde understondynge, common sense.
Kynde wit, common sense.
Kynne, kin ; kind.

Lacchen, to catch.
Laike, to play.
Laith, lays, from "leyn," to lay.
Lakeryng, groaning.
Lakken, to blame.
Lauben, to laugh.
Laubte, from "lacchen," to catch.
Leel, loyal, honest.
Lef, leaf, a valueless object.
Leode, man, tenement.
Leope, from "lepen," to leap.
Lesynges, lies.
Lete, to let, to allow.
Leve, leave.
Lewed, ignorant.
Leyn, to lay.

Leyve, to believe.
Lollere, an idle vagabond.
Lomes, tools.
Lorel, a worthless vagabond.
Louheliche, lowly.
Lovedays, days when quarrels were settled. Many abuses arose therefrom (see Skeat, Oxford ed., vol. ii. p. 47).
Loveliche, lovely.
Lover, louvre, from "l'ouvert" (Skeat).
Loupe, loop-hole.
Loute, to make obeisance, to bow.
Lowren, to show displeasure.
Lutede, from lute, to play on the lute.
Lyeth, from "liggen" (to lie), has reference to.
Lyfode, livelihood.
Lyggen, to lie.
Lykame, body.
Lykerous, luxurious.

Mafflid, mumbled.
Mannus, men.
Mase, confusion, anarchy.
Mellud, from melen, to speak.
Mene, mean, poor ; to mean.
Meteles, dream.
Metten, to dream.
Meyne, train, retinue.
Morwenyng, morning.
Motoun, a certain coin.
Morwe, may.
Muscles, mussels.

Nelde, needle.
Nelder, needle-seller.

Nempnen, to name, to mention.

Nere, near ; ne were.

Non, noon.

Nymen, to take, to receive.

Obediencer, a religious officer ; see
"Obedientiarius" in Du Cange.

Overlepen, to overtake.

Oubte, from "owen," to possess.

Pans, pence.

Papelotes, porridge.

Parailed, apparelled.

Payn, bread.

Penyworthes, pennyworths, goods
for sale.

Peren, to appear.

Pilie, to peel, "russches to pilie,"
to peel rushes in order to make
rushlight.

Possed, from "posschen," to chase
about.

Pound-meel, by pounds.

Preise, to appraise.

Prisones, prisoners.

Prophetes, prophets, profits.

Prymer, a book containing the
"Horæ" or Hours of the
Virgin Mary. (A prymer in
English, of the early XVth
century, belongs to the British
Museum ; Addit. MS. 17010.)

Puttes, pits, prison.

Queyntise, cunning.

Rape, make haste.

Raplich, hastily.

Reden, to advise.

Rely, to reel, *i.e.*, to wind on a
reel.

Renke, man.

Rent, revenue.

Roxed, stretched himself.

Ruel, from the French "ruelle,"
narrow space between the bed
and the wall.

Rutte, from "rowten," to snore.

Ryg, back.

Sad, grave, serious.

Sauter, psalter.

Schrewe, tyrant, scoundrel.

Seggen, to say.

Segges, people, men.

Selcouthe, extraordinary.

Seme, load.

Settyng, from "setten," placing,
planting.

Seylde, seldom.

Seyntwarie, sanctuary.

Shewen, to declare, to show.

Shonye, to shun.

Shop, from "shapen," to put, to set.

Shroudes, ample floating garments.

Shultrom, battalion.

Side, large.

Siker, secure.

Sipbre, cipher.

Sithen, then.

Sith then, since.

Sitten, to remain ; to cost.

Skath, evil, wrong.

Sondis, messages.

Soper, soap-seller (?), sweeper (?)

Souter, cobbler.

Sovereynes, lords.

Spenen, to spend.

- Stappe*, to walk.
Swonken, swynken, to work.
Sykyuge, sighing.
Synwee, to sin.
Syth then, since.
Sywestere, sempstress.

Take (besides the usual meaning),
to give, to receive.
Tho, they, those, those who, then,
when.
Thrumbled, stumbled.
Thurste, durst.
Tituleris, tattlers.
To-logged, pulled about.
Trusse, to get away.
Tryuth, truth.
Tynt, from "tyne," to lose.

Umbwchyle, at intervals.
Uncoupled, free in his movements.
Unite, sanity.
Unlouken, to unlock.
Up-holders, dealers in left-off
clothes.

Waite, from "waiten," to ob-
serve, to watch.
Waker, watching.
Wanye, to decrease.
Warcine, warren.
Warth, from "weorthan," to be-
come.

- Warynere*, warrener.
Wattis, wights.
Wedde, to pledge, to marry.
Welden, to receive.
Wered, from "were," to wear.
Werre, war.
Wexe, to grow.
Whederward, whitherward.
Wikkedlokest, as wicked as possible.
Wirchyng, being made.
Wissen, to teach.
Witerly, for certain.
Woldestow, wouldst thou.
Wone, dwelling.
Wonen, to dwell.
Worden, to speak.
Worthen, to be, to become; "lat
the catte worthe," let the cat
alone.
Wowe, wall.
Wratthe, to be angry.
Wye, wight.
Wyghtlyche, speedily.
Wynkyng, half asleep.

X, I.
Xcrammyd, crammed.
X-lete, esteemed.
Xoden, yeden, went.
X-served, well served.
Xoupid, supped.
Xut, yet.



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